

Ray – Prologue

One little mistake was all it took to change his life forever. It began with a party with a few of his buddies a few weeks after graduation. They had split a case of beer and of the group he had the least to drink. He wasn't the Designated Driver, but the fellow who was managed to conceal how drunk he really was. They'd been involved in an accident going home, with another drunk driver. Out of six people, Ray was the sole survivor. His blood alcohol was 0.04, legal if he'd been an adult, but illegal in California for an 18-year-old.

Worse, he'd be facing old judge 'Hardcase', so called because he had a thing about drunk drivers. Judge Jenkins had been a JAG lawyer, rising to the rank of Colonel in the USMC. He'd spent several years as a presiding officer at courts-martial. When his 18-year-old daughter was killed by a drunk driver, he retired. He was later elected as a California Superior Court judge. Ray thought the judge should have been called Hardcastle because of his resemblance to Brian Keith, who played a retired judge in Hardcastle and McCormick, a TV series that ended the year before, 1986.

His attorney suggested that, should the judge offer him anything other than jail time, he jump on it. The judge gave him a choice, the maximum jail sentence or volunteer for the USMC; in which case, his record would be expunged. And, this was how Ray found himself in boot camp at Camp Pendleton, USMC.

A second string player on his high school football team, the demands of the Corps in boot camp didn't overly stress him. In due time, his physical conditioning improved to the point where he was in the top 10% of his training platoon; and when they'd qualified with their M16s, his score was second best.

At 2 years, he was a Lance Corporal on the fast track for Corporal and later Sergeant. His vocation, and training, was in Division Reconnaissance. Ray then applied for Force Reconnaissance and passed the board. There wasn't a thing about him that didn't scream, Marine; he was one of the best of the best. At 4 years, he was a Sergeant on the fast track for Staff Sergeant. And, Ray decided he liked the Corps enough to consider a career, especially considering his rapid advancement.

Urgent Fury had occurred while he was in high school and Ray had missed Just Cause. Ray wasn't left out of the action because in '91, Bush initiated Desert Storm. By this time, he was Force Recon and Scout Sniper qualified. His weapon in Desert Storm was one the newly acquired M82A1M. The Corps was the first US military organization to adopt the Barrett rifle. His rifle wasn't the specialized version for Mk211MP, although he used the ammunition.

He didn't see action again until Enduring Freedom, and later, Iraqi Freedom. By then, he was a Gunnery Sergeant and no longer on a fast track for additional promotions. Hence, he retired when he had his 20 in.

Ray – Chapter 1

The movie *Heartbreak Ridge* had come out while he was a senior in high school. He never met anyone quite like Gunny Highway with his motto, *Improvise, Adapt, Overcome* during his 20 years of service. On the other hand, Ray was a marksman in the finest tradition of the Corps. He didn't care for the M16 or the later M4 with their direct impingement gas system. By the time he retired, H&K was promoting their soon to be released HK416. He had acquired 4 lowers for the M4A1s, but had no uppers. When H&K began to market the uppers to the civilian market, he acquired 4 and mated them with his M4 lowers. Thus, he came to possess 4 off the books select fire HK416s. He also purchased in the time following his retirement, a McMillan Tac-50 rifle with a Night Force NXS 12-42x56mm scope with a Mil-Dot Reticle. Ray got a job as an armed guard at a local bank.

Ray ordered, paid for and waited months for a MUNS AN/PVS-27 from OSTI. The MUNS was a limited availability item and considered the most powerful and durable of the US made Night vision riflescopes, specifically engineered for rough duty use on large caliber rifles like the Barrett and McMillan .50 caliber rifles. His Tac-50 seemed to be especially accurate with either setup.

The 4 HK416s were equipped with the AN/PVQ-31 Rifle Combat Optic, ergo, the Trijicon manufactured ACOG. His HK416s were equipped with the HK suppressors, a truly expensive acquisition. He also acquired 4 of the select fire HK417s, also with the suppressors and ACOGs. All 8 rifles had the longest barrel offered, the 20". Finally, he purchased 4 Mk 23s, again with the HK suppressors.

Not one of his firearms was registered with the BATFE, a truly remarkable situation. It was especially remarkable in that he had in his possession 8 select fire weapons manufactured after 1986 plus 12 off the books suppressors. His civilian weapon collection equaled anything FORECON used, and then some. That's what Force Recon was called now, FORECON. Fortunately, he lived in Vermont where automatic weapons and suppressors were not uncommon. The only problem lay in the fact that, contrary to Vermont law, his weapons weren't on the NFA registry.

If that weren't enough to land him in Leavenworth or Florence, his possession of several cartons of M67s, the later models of the LAW rocket, the M72E8, AG-C/EGLM and an assortment of 40mm grenades, mostly HE, HEDP and illumination rounds, airburst and #4 buckshot. Ray was ready to fight WW III, if it ever happened. Assuming that he survived, that is. One of the sources he used for ammo was John's Gun Shop; wherein he learned about Frugal Squirrel and other survival oriented websites.

Ray's search of the internet revealed several additional websites and he joined each, in turn and began his education. He began reading some of the fiction, including TOM, Fleataxi and Jerry D Young. Ray had no intention of overthrowing the government and learned that he was more properly a prepper. He soon realized that his preparations

were totally inadequate because he lacked most of the things necessary to truly survive WW III.

He considered his financial situation and realized that to be totally prepared, were there such a thing, he needed a properly equipped shelter, food, water, etc. ad infinitum. He had been buying gold and silver since it had become legal and had a substantially number of Krugerrands, both full ounce and fractional, and roll after roll of pre-65 dimes, quarters and halves. He possessed two of the many items preppers were expected to have, guns and precious metals.

Gold rose sharply in 2009, and he sold enough to allow him to complete his preparations and hopefully repurchase the gold at a lower price should the market drop. In 2009, Ray was a 41-year-old retired Gunnery Sergeant with an extremely large supply of gold coins. He contracted a local contractor and explained what he wanted built on his small acreage in terms of a shelter. The contractor gave him all kinds of screwy looks, but since the customer was always right, scheduled the construction two months in the future when he had time and the weather was on his side.

Meanwhile, Ray had two months to have a new well drilled and planned to build the shelter directly over wherever the well went in. The driller insisted on dowsing if he were expected to put in the deep well Ray said he wanted. He would guarantee a deep well only if Ray agreed to let him do his coat hanger exercise. Wanting a good well, Ray agreed. He began the process of acquiring those things that he needed to equip the shelter from American Bomb Shelter, which was somehow related to American Saferooms, Inc. of Oakland, Oregon, but unrelated to American Saferoom Doors in Los Angeles, California.

It was very expensive, but the Oregon Company had a package and he went for it. His food sources were spread out all over the country and included Walton Feed, Emergency Essentials, Bob's Red Mill, Nitro Pak and several others. It appeared to him that he was late to this prepping business and the only way to insure an adequate supply of food was to order from several sources.

At this point in time, he had the special requirements for the shelter, excluding radiation equipment. Based on one of Jerry D Young's stories, he went with the package from Radmeters4U, adding a CD V-700 and a CD V-717 to The Package. In the process, he added extra CD V-742s and a spare charger. Another company provided the AMP-200, Arrowhead Tech, Inc. in North Dakota. The same company provided Potassium Iodate which purportedly tasted better than Potassium Iodide.

He was, however, only getting started. One thing he'd noticed when he'd read Jerry's stories was Jerry's propensity for using only top of the line equipment, which proved to be very, very expensive. Ray bought many of the items Jerry mentioned in his stories or sought out a substitute he considered nearly equal at a much lower price. Because of this decision, he was able to purchase many additional items.

Fleataxi had a thing for Mossberg shotguns and since he'd seen the 590A1 in use in Iraq, he purchased 4 of the shotguns, one of a few of his legal firearms. Based on something TOM wrote about, he added another high ticket purchase, also legal. He purchased 4 California legal Springfield Armory Super Match rifles and had them fitted with the ACOGs, Leupold Mark IV 6.5-20x50mm LR/T M1 and Harris bipods. At this point the gold market was higher and he was getting low on funds and sold additional gold to pay for the additional items he wanted.

He started first on the ammunition he hadn't yet acquired and purchased ammo by the case, including Remington low-recoil shells, Remington full-power loads, Black Hills 62gr BTHP 5.56x45mm, and Black Hills 175gr BTHP 7.62x51mm cartridges. Ray also purchased Brenneke slugs and Speer .45ACP in both Lawman and Gold Dot +P, both 200gr. When he received his M1As, he followed up by ordering 100 20-round USGI magazines from 44Mag dot com, acquiring new USGI magazines made by CMI for \$20 a pop. Since the Mk 23s were a handful, he also acquired 4 new Browning Hi-Power Classic models and additional 13-round magazines. He rounded out his armory with a Remington 12 gauge with the longer barrel and 3½" chamber, but only one this time and 2 reproduction Winchester model 62 pump action rifles.

He was down to needing a large supply of hunting shells for the 870 and multiple bricks of .22LR ammo in several sizes, including subsonic, high velocity, hollow point and hyper velocity. He added Butler Creek folding stocks to the two 10/22s and flashhiders. He also bought some 25 round magazines for the 10/22s.

Well before the contractor was scheduled to begin construction, he added a motel sized septic tank and oversized drain field. He also added a 40,000-gallon diesel tank after selling yet more of his Krugerrands and had the tank filled and stabilized with PRI-D. His final fuel purchases were a 1,000-gallon gasoline tank filled and stabilized with PRI-G plus a 3,300-gallon propane tank that he had to purchase as opposed to renting one.

With the well in, he added a ~2,000-gallon water tank and had everything near where he decided to have the bomb shelter installed. By now, he had food stacked in dozens of places covered with tarps and the ammo, weapons, and assorted other things stacked in his garage. It became a matter of filling in several other items like MOLLE gear, assorted pouches and an advanced first aid/trauma kit.

"I want that shelter built according to these plans, but larger. Let's go with 30' wide and 60' long internal dimensions. In addition, I want an overhead of reinforced concrete at least a foot thick and deep enough to allow for 6 feet of compacted soil on top."
(PF=33,554,432)

"Are you expecting WW III?"

"I've been reading and have developed these concepts over a period of time. Is there a problem?"

“It’s going to cost substantially more.”

“What the hell, it’s only money. What’s the value of a human life?”

“In basic chemicals, about \$4. Are you sure you can afford this?”

“I can, even if it means selling more of my gold.”

“You’ve got gold?”

“Quite a bit actually.”

“Pay me in gold and I cut the price by 25%.”

“Forty percent.”

“Last offer 30 percent.”

“You have a deal. I needed this completed as soon as possible; the world scene seems to be heating up.”

“We can only build it so fast; the concrete has to set up.”

“Add an accelerator to the concrete.”

“That’s extra.”

“Use that concrete they use to build interstate highways.”

“That’s extra too.”

“Just do it.”

“I need 30% down for this project.”

Ray had to dig a bit deeper into his gold supply, but at the moment, the price of gold was almost \$1,000 an ounce and was expected to fall in price soon. He counted out 6 one ounce Krugerrands for the down payment. He also explained that he already had the extra shelter equipment. The contractor, realizing he’d lose his profit on the sale of the shelter equipment, indicated that installation of shelter equipment wasn’t included in the agreed price.

Ray agreed to pay the installation labor, but no more. As he reviewed what he’d spent thus far, he concluded that he’d have to downgrade his ham radio equipment, selecting Kenwood rather than Yaesu. The beam antennas were out of the question and he decided on the TS-2000X, an alternative antenna, the MFJ 10 band vertical MFJ 1798.

Ray also opted for Motorola CM-300s and CP-200s, several CB handhelds and a full set of radios for his Suburban with the pre-electronic diesel engine. He selected a 100' Monopole antenna tower and added a Starduster CB base station antenna and a SSB Galaxy 2547 CB base station.

By the time everything was completed, Ray had spent over 100 grand. However he had cash left over and the price of gold had fallen to \$602.50 an ounce. He replaced as much of his gold as possible. The financial markets had settled down with stock prices moving steadily upward as the price of gold and silver fell. He saved out just enough of his cash to buy a Kohler 30REOZJB with a large supply of oil and filters plus a 100amp 4 lead (240v) ATS.

Since he'd waited so long to get the generator, a separate enclosure had to be built to hold it. The contractor cut a hole in the wall of the shelter and connected the generator room to the shelter via a 30" concrete culvert. The side benefit was the reduced noise in the now finished shelter. Ray paid the contractor off in Krugerrands, retaining his recently purchased American Eagles. When his next retirement check came in, it went into Silver Eagles.

An 8' folding table and a 6' folding table were added to the shelter. Several used office chairs provided seating. A used storage cabinet became his gun safe and a second cabinet became the storage space for his electronics subject to EMP. He considered the shelter nearly completed when the bathroom fixtures were added and hooked in. He still didn't have a kitchen. The walls of the shelter were lined with food and ammo. Finally, he added a new refrigerator (only) and a 25ft³ chest freezer and washer and dryer to the cabin

He also began double buying groceries from the local grocery and Sam's Club. One end wall soon was half covered with 30 roll bundles of Charmin, Kleenex and paper towels. He eventually called a stop and moved onto other items and barter goods.

Some of his purchases included canned tuna, ham, Kirkland beef, chicken, corned beef and spam. It was buy, buy, buy until he decided that he had enough food for 4 people for a full year. Why 4 of every firearm; backups and backups to the backups? Ray then began to rotate his food under the concept of buy what you eat and eat what you buy, excluding the LTS foods.

He added bacon and hams to the freezer followed by a box of pork loins cut into roasts and chops. He then bought a whole beef, cut and double wrapped and a hog that was turned into Canadian bacon, bacon, smoked hams and picnics (cut into smaller portions) with the remainder ground into sausage. One day, Ray realized that his preps were finished except for replacing what he used up. Gold continued to fall and he continued to replace it with American Eagles. The DOW was now over \$11,000 and climbing and gold was under \$500. There were still miscellaneous purchases like a water filter and camping gear. It seemed that only a millionaire could afford to do this preparations thing the right way.

Ray – Chapter 2

When Ray's mother and father had died, he sold all of their land except for 15 acres and the inheritance, including insurance, had gone into gold and silver. While gold and silver tend to hold their value, they don't directly produce income. He was in Afghanistan when their house burned down with both asleep in their bed. He couldn't get back and arranged for cremation and asked the funeral home to hold the urns.

Ray hadn't started out to be wealthy, considering how much they pay Marines. However, he was frugal in the Corps and the inheritance didn't hurt. The second aspect of his wealth was the adage buy low, sell high. He'd done that with his purchases of gold and silver coins.

Their house had been razed and he'd had a prebuilt log cabin erected over the basement. He'd picked the cabin on the internet and taken leave to meet with the builder and make arrangements. When it was finished, he took another week to check it out and buy minimal furnishings.

Realizing now that his guard job was barely keeping him in bacon, bullets and beans, he started looking for a better job. He finally found one working as a bonded, armed courier for high value/special packages. The work took him away from home for extended periods. One side benefit was the federal CCW, arranged for by his new employer. The new job paid very well, more than he'd earned in his lifetime. He added a Walther PPK in .380 as a backup to the MK 23, sans suppressor, he carried.

When the shelter was finished, Ray erected a single full width wall, dividing the shelter into a living area and a storage/utility area. The storage area was 30' wide by 20' deep, leaving a general shelter area of 40'x30'. He then spent a weekend or three moving all of his accumulated supplies to the storage area, winching it down the vertical access one load at a time.

New lines were run to connect the ATS in the generator room to commercial power and the genset. What he couldn't do, he hired done, like the wiring and plumbing. While none of it was cheap, his new job paid extremely well, not only covering the costs but allowing him to continue to replace his gold.

At the point where he began to transfer his gun collection to the storage room, he paused to reflect on why he had purchased 4 of everything except for the 870. Spares? More is better? The only way he could shoot more than one gun at a time was if he were using handguns. His supply of ammo was almost overwhelming when he moved it, 5,000 rounds of match grade for the M1As, 5,000 rounds of Lake City 147gr surplus for each of the HK417s and 5,000 rounds of Lake City M855 for the HK416s.

There were a case each of Brenneke slugs, 00, #4 buck and flechettes for each of the Mossberg's. He had 20 cans of Barrett M33, 10 cases of Hornady 750gr A-Max Match

plus 34 cans of the Mk211. Cases of M67s and 40mm grenades plus 60 LAW rockets. If you could shoot a Blackhawk down with an RPG-7, could you do it with a LAW?

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This trip was to ferry a package from the Pentagon to Holloman AFB. It was only a briefcase, but the job was critical. On the return trip, he was to ferry an identical briefcase from Holloman back to the Pentagon. There was one restriction, the briefcase could never leave his hand and was cuff linked to his left wrist. Plus, he had an escort, probably Delta, he thought. The escort also had a federal CCW and, they used military, not commercial, transportation, a C-37B aka Gulfstream V. It was the first time he'd ever rode in one.

Upon his return, he was told to stay by his satellite phone, just in case, but his next scheduled trip was in 3 weeks. He checked his bank balance when he returned and topped off diesel and stabilized it when it was delivered the next day. With some of the remaining funds, he bought a second 3,000-gallon propane tank, had it buried, connected and filled.

Ray's kitchen stove, refrigerator, grill, furnace and dryer used propane. He also had a fireplace that would burn wood or coal. Outside was his pile of firewood, just short of 20 cords, and a pile of anthracite coal, 10 tons. He had the laptop, and a TV fed by satellite dishes. His only phones were his cell and the satellite phone.

With time on his hands, he inventoried his preps and created a database in Access. In those times when he wasn't off fighting another war, Ray took classes in all of the programs included in Microsoft Office. He had Office 2007 Professional on his laptop. Ray also had a desktop down in the shelter and a small home Ethernet network to connect the two computers to each other and to the internet.

One field in Access stored the recommended level of each item and he could compare what he had to the recommended level. When he finished the inventory, he still had 3 days until the next assignment and decided to go shopping to fill in the holes. He added a case of chickens for the freezer, 2 small turkeys, frozen fish filets, additional ground round, bacon, Cure 81 hams, additional bread flour and assorted canned vegetables and prepared foods. While it didn't seem like a lot, Ray spent over \$900. He also ordered 2 50-pound bags of hot chocolate from Walton. Ray drank coffee in the morning, tea throughout the day and hot chocolate in the evening.

He also went to the Res and picked up a full case of Marlboros he'd pre-ordered. It was a bit more than going to a military base to buy, but it was much closer. One of the other things Ray had was 4 cases of fresh, military issue MREs. He acquired those at the same source that had provided all of his military only weapons and ordnance. Suffice it to say that Ray knew a guy... The guy had called and offered him some of those M1022 rounds for his Tac-50. They had succeeded in duplicating the ballistics of the Mk 211 in a FMJ match grade round. The guy said he'd ship one can free and if Ray liked it, he

make him an offer he couldn't refuse. Ray agreed to try it and asked how much it was going to cost him. He was told, "Less than the Barrett M33 and a lot less than the Hornady."

Not included in Ray's armory was the USMC DMR, but the Super Match rifles more than made up for it with their scopes and Harris Bipods. Since he acquired the weapons, Ray had fired each and selected the most accurate of each model as his personal weapon in that category. These weapons were stored in the log cabin, in a special closet. Only his favorite Mk 23 and the PPK were in evidence.

At the moment, he was considering replacing the Mk-23 with a USP Tactical and moving the PPK to an ankle holster. Operators, to a man, seemed to prefer handguns in .45ACP and Ray was no exception. He was trying to decide between the USP and the Para Ordinance P-14. Ray was no fan of Glocks although they were a popular handgun. He had carried a Kimber for a while, but preferred the Mk 23.

His new job interfered with his morning routine designed to keep him in shape. The routine consisted of pushups, sit-ups, pull-ups and a 3 mile jog. For those times when the weather wouldn't permit, Ray had a treadmill with adjustable slope and speed. It wasn't the same as outside so he ran longer. He was probably in better shape than when he retired. At 6'2, 170 pounds, Ray had a body mass index of 21.8, about mid-range (18.5-25) for healthy individuals. What was absent was much body fat.

Since the shelter entrance stood out like a sign saying, "This is the shelter entrance," Ray had a hollow fiberglass rock that fit over the opening. The opening was roughly 24"x32" so one can understand why the generator had to have its own room. While the shelter was built using reinforced concrete, the entrance was adjoining and larger at the bottom to allow the separate blast door to open. Anyone trying to gain entrance to the shelter when it was locked down had to get past two separate entrances. The access to the generator was the escape tunnel for the shelter modeled after those described in several of Jerry's stories, a hatch under sand overlaid with sod.

Before he left on his next assignment, Ray wrote a letter to Ronnie Barrett.

Dear Mr. Barrett,

I was one of a select few individuals who had the opportunity to test fire your XM-109 Payload rifle. It was an outstanding weapon, despite the excessive recoil. I am retired from Force Recon and replaced my issue Barrett rifle with a McMillan Tac-50 (Mk 15) with the Nightforce scope and MUNS.

Have you considered developing a soft mount for the XM-109 similar to the soft mount for the M107? If you could, it might solve the recoil problem. I, for one, would be interested in purchasing such a system should it become available.

Respectfully,

Raymond Johnson, GySgt, USMC, Ret.

The next assignment required transporting a set of DVDs from Atlanta to Seattle via commercial transportation. In this case he had to fly United and there were no direct flights. Ray opted to change planes in Philadelphia. The trip involved a lot of flying, Burlington to Kennedy, Kennedy to Hartsfield, Hartsfield to Philadelphia, Philadelphia to Seattle, Seattle to Kennedy and Kennedy to Burlington.

Ray picked up a tail when he left the office in Atlanta. Whoever it was must have had some kind of pull, she was on every flight he made from Atlanta back to Kennedy. She was following him, not the package. She lost him at Kennedy; or perhaps she knew his next destination. It left Ray with a creepy feeling.

Ray's next trip was in 10 days, a New York package to Los Angeles, a Los Angeles package to Denver and a Denver package to New York; again, via commercial air. Flights to New York were provided by Delta Air while other airlines serviced Chicago and Philadelphia. Someday he'd book an around the world trip paid for by his air miles; he had over 200,000.

This layoff, he had a 5,000-gallon gasoline tank installed, filled and treated with PRI-G. He spent the remainder of his time working on his shelter and studying for his General class amateur radio license. He took and passed the test the Saturday before his scheduled trip. He took along the laptop so he could study for his amateur extra class license. This particular trip involved layovers in each destination and would take 8 days.

Ray was a loner, interacting with people only when necessary due to the circumstances. Ray was once again picked up by a tail at Kennedy. She was on his flight to Los Angeles and in the same airport hotel in LA. He stopped by the bar for a drink and there she sat, pretending not to notice him.

"Buy you a drink?"

"Uh, thank you, no."

"Why not? You've been following me for the past two trips."

"I'm sure you're mistaken or it was just a coincidence."

"I'm not mistaken and it's no coincidence. I'm Ray."

"I know. I'm sorry; I'm rather new at tailing people."

"It shows. So, what is it, fed, state, local or private?"

"I really can't say."

“Ok, a fed; ATF, FBI, NSA?”

“None of the above. DIA.”

“DIA? DIA's mission is to provide timely and objective military intelligence to war fighters, policymakers, and force planners. How does that relate to me?”

“It doesn't. We're following the packages you're transporting, not you. That started after the trip to Holloman.”

“What, I'm a security risk?”

“Some of the packages may be. I've already said too much. I take a gimlet, thank you.”

Ray signaled to the bartender for refills and joined her.

“What do you know about me?”

“I read your whole package including the court report from that car accident. It's either committed to memory or in my notebook.”

“You wrote this down?”

“Notepad computer.”

“Still...”

“You've had an interesting career; Silver Star in lieu of the Navy Cross.”

“What I did wasn't worth a medal. I was doing the job they were paying me to do.”

“That's not what the records say.”

“Like I said no big deal. What did you do before you became a spy?”

“I was in the Corps for a single enlistment.”

“Semper Fi.”

“Oo-rah, Gunny. Had you stayed in, you've have made First Sergeant on the next boards.”

“That would have taken me too far from my first and only love.”

Ray – Chapter 3

“Sniping?”

“I was an instructor when I got out but yes, sniping.”

“I suppose you bought the same firearms you used in the service as soon as you got out.”

“Some.”

“What would you say if I told you I know otherwise?”

“I’d say you’ve been putting your nose in places it doesn’t belong.”

“You weren’t discrete enough Ray. I can’t give you a round count, but I have a complete list of your weapons. Why four of each instead of just one?”

“I’ve asked myself the same question. Spares? More is better?”

“You just like firearms.”

“I do that. So, now what?”

“With my cover blown, I’m out of DIA. I was on probation and this was a make or break deal.”

“So? Keep following me and reporting back.”

“Would that I could. Someone in this bar is following me and will report back that you caught me.”

“My employer is always looking for a few good men...or women. I have no idea what I transport; that’s part of the deal. One time it was a briefcase, once some DVDs and this time, each package is different. It’s not drugs; that much I do know. It’s just high value or special packages. Typical bonded courier stuff. I mean it’s just a very small part of FedEx Custom Critical White Glove Service.”

“Like I said, it’s not you or the company you work for. It’s the packages.”

“So you think we’re transporting illegal packages?”

“Some of them, yes.”

“Could be, I have no idea what the packages are.”

“But you had a good idea what you took to Holloman, right?”

“I actually saw it once. I assume this was a duplicate in case the President was at the shelter and his primary didn’t work, right?”

“I can’t say that you’re wrong.”

“Want to get dinner?”

“Sure, why not.”

After getting seated in the restaurant, the conversation continued.

“Take your order?”

“Ladies first.”

“I’ll have the small sirloin, medium, Caesar salad and rice pilaf.”

“Sir?”

“Small sirloin, medium, uh, I’ll have the same as the Lady.”

“Light meal.”

“I like to keep in shape. Do pull-ups, sit-ups, pushups and jog every day.”

“Where in Vermont?”

“Outside of Burlington. I have 15 acres.”

“Oh right, you inherited your parents’ farm.”

“I sold all but 15 acres. I had a log cabin built over the basement. Got into preparedness a while back and have been making improvements.”

“Well, for a survivalist, you taken care of the gun part.”

“I’m not out to overthrow the government; although I’m not sure anymore that some people aren’t.”

“I meant in its original context, my family was/is into prepping too. However their largest prep was lying in a good supply of booze.”

“In a big or small way?”

“Big I guess; BOBs, BOVs, BOL.”

“Shelter?”

“In the works, they’re expensive.”

“Yes, they are.”

“You sound like the voice of experience.”

“Fifteen grand for the basic structure with accessories I purchased directly installed. It’s stocked, but incomplete.”

“What’s missing?”

“Beds and bedrooms plus dishes, silver and cookware.”

“You don’t need the kitchen stuff with MREs,”

“I only have a few of those; most of my stuff requires preparation.”

“Country Living Mill and the whole 9 yards?”

“Diamant 525 that I bought from Lehman’s plus extra burrs. Expensive! I also have some bread flour stored in a freezer.”

“Solar, wind or generator?”

“I have a generator rated at 125amps prime power at 240vac with 30,000-gallons of diesel in a 40,000-gallon tank. I’ll finish filling the tank soon. It won’t be run at full power because at full power, it would burn 2.6gph. The tank holds 40k so I guess it would run near the limit for about 2 years, give or take.”

“Where’s your printing press? In the basement?”

“Oh, the money? First, I was frugal in the Corps. Second, I got the insurance and inheritance. Third, I put most of it in Krugerrands and pre-65 silver when it was relatively cheap. Fourth, I have some low friends in high places.”

“I know about your source, remember?”

“So he’s going to Leavenworth and I’m losing my ordnance?”

“Neither. What he’s doing has been approved by very high places. You really should take him up on the M1022, it is great ammo. So you wrote Ronnie Barrett?”

“Reading my mail too?”

“No, he passed it along and said he was going to give it a try. They may have to modify the soft mount, but they might be able to make it work. If they do, I suspect you’ll get the first one off the production line for the suggestion.”

They ate in relative silence since Ray hadn’t asked her name.

“After dinner drink?”

“Irish coffee. By the way, it’s Sandra Hughes.”

“As you probably already know, Raymond Johnson.”

“Could we get an Irish Coffee and a Rusty Nail?”

“What’s that Ray?”

“It’s Scotch and Drambuie on the rocks. I know one that is a perfect ladies drink, the Widows Kiss Cocktail. Most places don’t know how to make it or lack the ingredients.”

“I’ll have to try that some time.”

“So now what?”

“I expect a phone call to order me back to DC. Then, I’ll be looking for work. At least I’ll be able to report that your situational awareness is top notch.”

“Has to be doing this type of work.”

“Mind if I ask what you carry?”

“Mk 23 with a PPK for backup. Been thinking about swapping the PPK to an ankle holster and going with another .45 for backup. I’m considering the USP Tactical or the P-14.”

“I carry the USP Compact; it’s a fine gun.”

“I may just go with the USP. Where do you carry it?”

“Galco purse. You?”

“Andrews Leather Monarch with 3 spare magazines and a Gerber Mk 1 plus the PPK in an IWB holster.”

Ray picked up the check and count off the cash. "Well, it's time for me to bid you good-night Sandra."

"Early pickup?"

"I have a one day layover. I thought I'd check out The Museum of Western Heritage."

"That gives me an idea. I won't have to return until I'm recalled. What a companion?"

"If you want to go along, sure."

"What time?"

"Breakfast at 0800 and Museum around 1000?"

"Deal. Meet you here at 0800."

o

Sandra didn't get recalled. TPTB decided that perhaps they could turn Ray, just a little, and learn what he was carrying. If not, perhaps they could use Sandra in a different way. Maybe give her an obscure job in Burlington and let her learn a little more from Ray. According to the person following Sandra, Ray and she had many common interests. And, after all, he was a decorated military hero and a rifleman's rifleman.

Sandra wasn't quite what she seemed to be. Before enlisting, she'd received a degree in Political Science. Unable to find a suitable job, she'd enlisted and put 4 in on active duty, actually serving 2 tours in the sandbox. Because of her childhood training, she qualified Expert with both the M16 and the M9. Upon release from active duty she was 27 and found a job with the DIA, initially as an analyst. When they needed a field op and none was available, our analyst turned field op. Unfortunately she was following a Marine who hadn't lost his edge or situational awareness.

o

They had a great time at Gene Autry's museum and ate dinner for a second night learning more about each other. As occasionally happens, they became attracted to each other. They continued with the charade and Sandra continued to gather information about the packages. The package from LA to Denver contained bearer bonds. The package from Denver to New York had no description and was a manila envelope filled with a small packet of papers. The first package was a slim briefcase shackled to Ray's left wrist.

When the trip ended, they silently parted ways, Ray to Burlington and Sandra to DC. After her debriefing, she was told she was being transferred to the FBI office in Burlington and it was suggested that she spend a little time with Ray and determine the nature

of the future packages. She hesitated almost too long before accepting, which resulted in another semi-negative comment in her package.

Ray – Chapter 4

Ray was busy finishing off the interior of the shelter, planning a bedroom, 2 bunkrooms and his needed kitchen supplies. He had time and browsed several of the sites. He decided to purchase a Crown Berkey plus spare filters and called to find out if he could pick it up. He wasn't far from their location.

After the trip, he stopped at the lumberyard and got 2x4s, rented a Ramset and nail guns, nails and asked them to deliver the rolls of insulation and car siding. Ray laid it out and built the frame for the front and side walls. Once in place, he checked the level and used the ramset to anchor the plate and footers to the concrete. Next, he installed duplexes, switches and ran the Romex. Once the wiring was connected and tested, he began mounting the 1"x8" car siding. Four days later, he was done and returned the tools to the lumberyard and got 3 pre-hung solid core 32" doors plus the trim.

He ordered 4 military surplus bunks (39"), mattresses and 4 standing lockers plus 4 foot lockers. Finally he made a trip to a furniture store and bought 2 swag lamps, one table lamp, a queen sized bed, dresser and night stand, a sofa and 2 easy chairs for the common area. Lastly he selected an inexpensive kitchen table with one leaf and 6 chairs. The office chairs were moved to the common area

He also picked up some Varathane, brushes and roller kit plus spare covers. It took a long day to apply the Varathane and he stored the remaining acrylic and rollers. He used lacquer thinner to clean the paint brush. He ordered what he wanted for the kitchen from Canning Pantry as a service of 8 and also got 2 30qt All American Pressure Canners, 2 gross of boxes of regular mouth quarts and 1 gross of boxes of regular mouth pints. To this, he added assorted canning spices and 2 full cases of regular lids... 60 dozen boxes per case.

He had no sooner finished than his cell phone rang. It was Sandra who said she had good news/bad news. She was in Burlington and wondered if he'd go for a pizza and beer, her treat. He replied yes in a heartbeat.

"Well, the bad news is that I don't work for the DIA any longer. The good news is that I'm working in the local FBI office as an Administrative Assistant. I think I'll work on my Masters and PhD in political science. What's new with you?"

"The shelter is finished and waiting for two orders to come in, bunk beds plus canning supplies and kitchenware. As soon as I have the orders and the diesel is topped off, I'll be done. However, the new job pays so well, I'm going to add the beam antennas to my Monopole. I did call and order the extra M1022 based on your recommendation."

"I'd love to see it sometime."

"I'll pick you up on Saturday and give you the grand tour if you'll give me your home address."

“I left out something that may cause you to change your mind.”

“You’re supposed to pump me for information?”

“How did you know?”

“It just seemed logical.”

“I like you Ray. My conscience almost stopped me from taking this assignment. Then I realized that if I told you the truth, it would be the better of two worlds. The job is to get to know you better so I could pump you about the packages. I like the getting to know you better part and since you know, I’d only get the information you wanted me to know.”

“So, you figured you could have your cake and eat it too? What if I didn’t go along with your little plan?”

“I considered that; either way, I have nothing to lose.”

“Just how far were/are you prepared to go playing this game?”

“I wouldn’t do anything that I wouldn’t do under normal circumstances. I’m sorry, maybe this wasn’t a good idea; I thought I detected some interest on your part. I’ll just go back to DC and tell them it didn’t work out.”

“Don’t be in a hurry; I haven’t indicated whether or not I’d go along with your plan. As it happens, your conclusion that I might be interested wasn’t completely off base. I’ve been a loner since I entered the Corps. I never had time for close attachments; either with a woman or the people I worked with or later was in charge of. Sandra, you’re the first woman I’ve actually had a date with since high school. It’s partially self-centered, it’s harder to get hurt if someone dies and your attachment is limited.”

“Then you like me too?”

“What’s that expression? Oh yeah, I wouldn’t throw you out of bed for eating crackers.”

“I wasn’t suggesting I was ready to hop in the sack with you.”

“No, but you did say your limit was that you wouldn’t do anything that you wouldn’t do in normal circumstances. I wouldn’t either. My thought was *que sera, sera*. You’re one heck of a lot more attractive than your typical Marine recruit.”

“What about the age difference?”

“How old are you?”

“You know better than ask that, but I’m 27.”

“Fourteen years younger? I’d have thought more.”

“Thank you. Actually I got my bachelor’s degree in Poly Sci before I entered the Corps. Like I said, I was considering entering the Master’s program here at one of the colleges to improve my cover. I think the DIA might go for it.”

“Before I offered you the grand tour tomorrow, I was planning on going to the quarry to get in some shooting. Care to go along?”

“Just give me directions.”

“To my place or the quarry?”

“Both. I’ll come to your place and ride with you to the quarry. I’d really like to see that shelter you built.”

“I screwed up when I had it built, I didn’t have all of the equipment I needed and the shelter entrance is just too small to get some things in. For example, I had to have a spare bunker built for the generator and I can’t get a freezer or the kitchen down there. Not only that, I bought a queen size bed for the bedroom and there’s no way it will fit.”

“Every problem has a solution. Is money a problem?”

“Not really, why?”

“You could build a second entrance that would be large enough to solve that problem.”

“I suppose I could, but it would require two additional blast doors, one for the top and one in the shelter. We’re probably talking as much as twelve grand by the time the contractor does the retrofit and installs everything.”

“I didn’t realize it would be that expensive; maybe it’s not a good idea.”

“Actually, I think it is. I’ll have to get some quotes.”

“Ok. Well the pizza’s gone and I don’t want any more beer.”

“Would it improve your cover if you spent the night? I have a guest bedroom in the cabin.”

“You’re talking about appearances, right? After that crackers remark, a girl has to ask.”

“Yes, appearances only.”

“Ok, follow me back to my place and I’ll pack an overnight bag.”

o

That night, when Sandra toured the shelter, she realized, as did Ray, that the new entrance could only go in one place, it had to replace the existing entrance. That was good in that it eliminated one blast door. The blast hatch could remain as the escape hatch. They watched a movie on ION and retired to separate bedrooms. The next morning, Ray woke to the smell of frying bacon. He decided to forgo the usual morning workout and took care of business, showered and shaved.

“How do you like your eggs?”

“Over medium.”

“I woke early and was hungry; I hope you don’t mind.”

“It smells good and I can skip my morning exercise. I wouldn’t want to work out on a full stomach.”

“I’m sorry, I forgot...”

“That’s right; I told you that in LA. I’ll make the toast when the eggs are done. After breakfast, we’ll get you a set of guns from the shelter.”

“That cabinet?”

“Yes, I only keep my favorites in the cabinet. Each weapon is tagged indicating the level of accuracy I was able to achieve firing them. We’ll get you a set marked #2.”

“What don’t you have 4 of?”

“I only have one shotgun for hunting. My .22 rifles are evenly divided between reproduction model 62s and 10/22s. I suppose I should have a second shotgun for hunting. Maybe get an extra barrel for one of the Mossberg’s or another 870.”

“I didn’t see any .22 revolvers or pistols on the list.”

“I didn’t buy any. I thought about getting either 4 of those High Standard HDMs or Ruger Mark IIs with integral silencers. I saw one once in Scottsdale, Arizona. They wanted \$1,600 for it, plus sales tax and the ATF stamp.

“Which did you see, the High Standard or the Ruger?”

“Sorry, the Ruger with Ares silencer.”

“Can you get them?”

“I’d probably have to settle for the AWC Amphibian. The Amphibian S suppressor is interfaced to the Ruger MK III Stainless pistol and is designed to be used and routinely serviced by the owner. At any time the owner wishes, he can ship the pistol to their plant for a fast and inexpensive detail strip, cleaning and inspection. One other possibility is their Badlander, which is the same thing but isn’t made of stainless.”

“Do you have a picture?”

“I have their catalog.”

“If you bought some, would it be 4 again?”

“Probably. We can stack the dishes in the sink. I’ll fill it water and add a little Dawn to let them soak. Let’s take a bathroom break and go select your guns.”

“Sounds good, who first?”

“Ladies first. I’ll start bringing up the guns and you can help me after I finish in the bathroom.”

“Excuse me.”

Ray stacked the dishes and had several of the rifles on the kitchen table by the time Sandra finished. He used the bathroom and they went down to get the remaining guns, an Mk 23 and a Super Match. His cabin ammo supply was adequate for this quarry trip and he could restock it later. He loaded the can of M1022, some Black Hills 175 BTHP, Lawman for the .45s, some 00 buck and some M855 for the 416s. They drove to the quarry and Ray set up a folding table and chair. Next he set up B27 targets at 15 feet, 15 yards, 25 yards, 100 yards and 200 yards,

They fired the Mk 23s first at the first 3 targets and Sandra switched to her USP because the Mk 23 was a little heavy and grips too large. She was well qualified with the USP. They then switched to the 416s followed by the 417s and then the Super Match rifles. Next they shot the shotguns at new 50-yard targets. Finally, despite the limited range, they each fired a magazine each of the M1022 at 200 yards.

“You training still shows.”

“Part of it is that I qualified with an M4, shotgun and my USP. I qualified as a Sharpshooter with the first two and Expert with my pistol.”

Ray – Chapter 5

“Can I try the USP?”

“Sure, want a new target?”

“I’ll get that and reload some of the magazines.”

“And, I’ll load magazines too.”

Ray fired two magazines through the USP, scoring well and impressed with the pistol.

“That decided it; I’m going with the USP Tactical rather than the P-14. I wonder if the suppressors are interchangeable.”

“The suppressor will fit either one or the other, not both. The Tactical's thread pitch is M16x1LH, while the Mark 23 is M16x1RH. However there are some suppressors out there that have different mounting pieces that will allow you to have one suppressor and use it with several different mounts for differently threaded barrels.”

“Either way, it sounds like I should get new suppressors for the USP Tactical's.”

“How do you get all of the NFA weapons without getting the tax stamps?”

“If you don’t know from your research, I think it better not to answer that.”

“Are you sure you can afford the modifications to the shelter and the USPs with suppressors?”

“Yeah; and, I’ll get 4 of the .22 pistols too, probably the Badlander,”

“Are you ready to go back?”

“Yes I am. I’m getting hungry Sandra.”

◦

Ray had set out 2 New York strips, a large and a small baking potato and would use a bag of the prepared lettuce for a dinner salad. They left the guns in the living room area so they could clean them after they ate. They mostly made small talk during dinner with Sandra’s background being the main topic of discussion. After loading and starting the dishwasher, they cleared off the kitchen table and covered it with a plastic tablecloth. The weapons were moved to the table and Ray brought out the cleaning kits. Each cleaned the weapons they’d used that day. By the time they finished, it was getting late.

"It's awful late for you to drive back to your apartment. Why don't you stay over and after breakfast, we'll work on the shelter changes?"

"I really should get back."

"Expecting a call or anything?"

"No."

"Then stay; it will be the same arrangement as last night. That way, you can tell them you slept with me, leaving out the fact that was in separate bedrooms."

"I am getting sleepy from that great meal you cooked. Ok, I'll stay."

"Don't forget to hold breakfast until I return from jogging."

"I'll remember. Good night."

"G'night."

Ray cleaned up and got ready for bed remembering, as he did so, how well Sandra had done with all of the weapons. He expected her to be good, she was better than his expectations. He was asleep within 10 minutes. Sandra had also cleaned up and dressed for bed, but her thoughts were on Ray and she wasn't thinking about what an outstanding shot he was.

The following morning he rose around 6:30 and did his calisthenics and took off for his jog. He added an extra mile to make up for the run he'd missed the previous day. Sandra was up drinking coffee when he returned.

"I'll clean up while you throw together something for breakfast."

"Any preferences?"

"Pancakes and sausage might hit the spot; the sausage in the refrigerator and the pancake mix in the pantry cabinet."

Ray showered and shaved and then returned to the kitchen for breakfast, the smell of cooking sausage filling the air.

"May I ask a question?"

"What would you like to know?"

"I've never seen you smoke. However, there must be 100 cartons of cigarettes in the shelter storage room."

“Simple. Trade goods. The same applies to the cases of cheap liquor you saw. I have a few food handouts prepared in case TSHTF and I get people wanting food. I won’t trade guns or ammo.”

“This may sound silly because my family is also into preps, but do you really think we’ll ever need to use them?”

“Plan for the worst and pray for the best.”

“Ok if I add a few items that you don’t have much of?”

“What?”

“Feminine hygiene products and a few changes of clothing in my size; all for the image, you know.”

“No problem. Are you ready to work on the plans for the shelter changes?”

“Actually, I do have to get back, sorry.”

“Well ok, I really enjoyed this weekend.”

“I did too; thanks for everything Ray. Please try to keep me in the loop to the extent possible about your courier packages.”

“I’ll do what I can.”

◦

By evening Ray had the new plans roughed out and was ready to order the things he decided he needed. Those included the extra blast door, Millennium gas masks and PPE for 4 people including 8 cases of spare CBRN filters. In a chemical environment, the filters have a useful life of 8 hours. He planned to order a full case of N-100 masks while he was at it, another set of items he’d missed and Sandra commented on. Finally, He made a call and lined up the 4 USP Tactical’s four USP Compact Tactical’s and with 8 AWC suppressors 4 of the Badlander with 7 magazines for each of the pistols. He ordered both Gold Dot and Lawman to replace what they’d used up and for the extra pistols. The same company carried subsonic .22 ammo and he added 20 bricks, paying for it on his Visa card. The things from Approved Gas Masks also went on his Visa.

With the larger entrance, he’d move the freezer to the shelter and replaced the one in the cabin with a 9ft³ model. He’d also add the stacked laundry pair and . He checked through his mail and found a letter from Barrett Firearms.

Dear Mr. Johnson,

Thank you for your interest in our products.

We had been considering a soft mount for the XM109 and your letter spurred our Engineers to take a second look. They now believe they can do it. Whether the rifle will be available on the Civilian market remains to be seen. The underlying reason is the ammunition, much of which would be a destructive device under the NFA.

Respectfully,

Ronnie

Ray knew when the ammunition became widely available for the military he wouldn't have any trouble getting the 4 types of rounds listed on Global Security. The rounds were the M1019 air Bursting, M1049 Armor Piercing, M1051 Target Practice Spotter and the M1050 Target Practice. He doubted he'd need the M1047 Blank and had serious doubts about the M1060 Thermobaric round since it was described as a 40mm grenade.

After he was set with his orders, he called the contractor about the modifications. Business was off and the contractor offered a better price than expected, providing he got the blast door. He called Oregon and ordered the door plus 2 spare filters for the air unit. The extra filters were ordered based on TOMs belief that bad things happened in 3s. Checking his bank balance after placing the orders, he ordered more Products Research, Inc. (PRI) products. He also duplicated the previous orders from Walton, Emergency Essentials and other food suppliers. Finally, he called his military supplier.

"I'm not sure I can Ray. Assuming the services do adopt the 25mm rounds, they're going to be difficult to acquire. I'll check into it and let you know. Anything else?"

"Could you double my supply of M1022 and Mk 211?"

"I can if you have the money, what's on your mind?"

"I may add a M82A1M and both scopes."

"Ok, I guess, it's your money."

Did he really want M82A1M? Well there was no M109, so why not? He pulled up the phone number for Barrett's sales department and called the.

"Barrett Firearms, how can I help you?"

"I was thinking about getting a M82 configured as a M107."

"Name?"

“Ray Johnson, Burlington, Vermont.”

“Let me pull up your account. Here it is. Wait, there’s a note attached that says if you called to refer you to the boss. Hang on, I’ll make the transfer.”

“What’s this all about? Ray wondered.

“Ronnie Barrett.”

“Mr. Barrett, this is Ray Johnson in Vermont. When the salesman said the boss, I wasn’t expecting to speak to you.”

“You’re the guy who wrote the letter about the soft mount, right?”

“Guilty as charged.”

“Like I said in my letter, we had a similar idea, but since you tested the 109, you got our attention. Since I wrote you, our engineers have solved the problem by beefing up the soft mount and enlarging the mounting pins. How would you like to test the new prototype and give us an evaluation?”

“I’d like that very much, thank you.”

“When can you get to Murfreesboro?”

“When do you want me?”

“Two weeks too soon?”

“I’ll arrange it.”

“Ok, we’ll send you round trip plane tickets and reimburse any out of pocket expenses. While I said prototype, it’s actually the first of our production rifles. I look forward to meeting you.”

“Yes sir, me too.”

“See you in a couple. If you have any questions, call and talk to my secretary.”

“Yes sir.”

“Hey, lighten up, call me Ronnie.”

Ray – Chapter 6

“Yes sir.”

Ray called FedEx and arranged his absence. They had one quick trip that had just come up, New York to LA and return with no layovers, two days hence. He took it. He called Sandra and told her he'd be gone a couple of days on a courier assignment, no details were given. The tickets from Barrett arrived by FedEx. He noticed the tickets were first class. Someone was looking forward to his trip as much as he was.

The NY-LA-NY delivery was routine, diamonds outbound and a heavy bag of platinum on the return. He called Sandra when he got back and gave her the name of the companies and the package contents. Then he waited for his orders to arrive and put them away when they came. Everything he ordered was there, probably due to his willingness to pay premium transportation charges. That even included the pistols so he added an IWB holster for the USP replacing the PPK. He took the pistols to the quarry and fired all 8, tagging them as he went.

He made a quick trip to Burlington for new holsters and invited Sandra to her choice of lunch or dinner. She elected dinner and he had time to kill so he went shopping for a couple of things he wanted to add to his equipment, GPS receivers with the mapping function. Again he bought four, but only one set of mapping software. One store carried Randall knives and had 2 8" Fighting Stiletos, so he bought them.

Next, he made a dinner reservation for two and used a men's restroom to freshen up. He picked Sandra up at her apartment at 5:30 and they went out for seafood. While they were waiting for the food, he explained about the call to Barrett, omitting a few details. He also asked her what she thought of the M82 rifle.

“Awfully heavy, especially if you're carrying much ammo.”

“Ten full magazines weight about 31 pounds so you're probably lugging about 65-70 pounds.”

“So, you'll get a second chance to evaluate the XM109?”

“Yes, I hope the improvement works out. He said they were uncertain about civilian sales because of the ammo.”

“Maybe something can be worked out.”

“I called my friend he said he look into it. I ordered the pistols and silencers and they came in. I'm waiting on some additional food but I paid for premium freight to get it here quickly.”

“Something going on that I should know about?”

“No, I was simply increasing my preps.”

“I picked up those extra things I wanted. Ok if I bring them out Saturday?”

“I’ll look forward to it. I got the contractor lined up for the modifications and the extra blast door is on the way. I plan to move the large freezer to the shelter and put a small one in the cabin. I reviewed my prep equipment and filled in several holes, like gas masks, Tyvek suits and P-100 face masks. Oh, and the diesel tank is full.”

“Thanks for the information about the packages, it really helped.”

“No big deal, some diamonds and some very heavy platinum. Not what I usually deliver.”

“Does it help having the Top Secret clearance?”

“It did on the Holloman trip. Have you been following the news recently?”

“It’s awful, isn’t it?”

“Yes, it’s making me nervous. By the way, I checked out the Payload Rifle on Wiki. The common features include the BORS ballistic computer and a dual-chamber detachable muzzle brake or suppressor system. Barrett has always claimed that you couldn’t use a suppressor on their rifle without damaging it. I’m going to ask if they now have a .50 caliber suppressor.”

“Suppressors in .50 caliber are available.”

“But, they’re only intended for bolt action rifles.”

Sandra coming to the cabin became a regular weekend event. To an outsider, it would have been obvious that a deep, mutual attraction existed and was moving from a friendship towards something more. At that, the relationship remained platonic.

Finally the day came for the trip to Tennessee. Ray had to admit that he was excited at the opportunity to test the XM109. A car and driver, a hired Limo, was waiting for him at the Nashville airport. The driver took him to a motel in Murfreesboro and, after he registered, to Barrett. Someone was actually waiting for him at Barrett. She took him to see the boss.

“Trip ok?”

“Great; thanks for the car and driver. I checked and learned that you have an optional suppressor for the M109. Have you found something that will suppress the fifty without ruining the action?”

“Yes and no. We have them but that’s not for public consumption. With a rifle that powerful, a 30db sound reduction only gets it down to somewhere in the region of the sound signature of an unsuppressed .308. Ready to go shooting?”

“Lead the way.”

“You’ll be working with my Engineers and I’ll meet with you after the test and we’ll discuss the results.”

Barrett made a call and an Engineer arrived promptly to get Ray. They were joined by Chris Barrett. Without the soft mount, the M109 was just barely manageable. With the soft mount, it was a total pleasure. The rifle lacked a serial number, probably because it was considered a prototype despite being the first of an actual production run. When the test was completed, they had what amounted to an after action discussion.

After the meeting, Chris called Ray’s driver and told Ray to be back at 9:00am the next day. The next day, Ray gave his opinions to Ronnie Barrett and left to ride back to Nashville to catch his return flight. Five days after he returned, he received 3 packages from Barrett, delivered by a courier such as him. Inside the custom Pelican case was the same XM109 he’d fired including the 25mm suppressor, the M107 upper, also with the suppressor and muzzle brake. The second package included the magazines for the rifles. The final package contained 200 M1050 Target Practice.

There was no note of explanation with the packages and Ray noted that none of the items bore serial numbers. Each upper receiver was fitted with the same scope he’d purchased for his Tac-50. The next day, Ray was at the quarry getting both rifles sighted in. When he returned, he called this friend about the 25mm ammo.

“Sorry Ray, no luck so far.”

“Keep looking, I have the Payload Rifle now.”

“How did you accomplish that?”

“Maybe I was just lucky. Anyway, I could really use the ammo, I only have a few rounds of the M1050 left.”

“That stuff is expensive, almost \$23 per round. I’ll do what I can, but no promises. The M109 isn’t on the list and neither is the ammunition.”

“I have reason to believe that they will be soon. Do you know where I might be able to get a M1114 surplus?”

“The Hummer?”

“That’s the one.”

“Try searching the internet.”

o

Since the M1114 didn’t meet DOT standards for road use, complete vehicles weren’t sold at auction. Ray ended up buying a used 2006 H-1 Alpha and turning it over to a firm that armored vehicles. He told them he wanted the vehicle to meet or exceed the standards of the Military M1114. By the time he’d bought the H-1 and had it refurbished, it cost more than a new M1114 cost the military. However, it was complete, right down to the firing cupola with ring mount. Anything requiring the slightest maintenance had been repaired or replaced, especially the fuel tank.

Meanwhile he continued making deliveries and seeing Sandra. She had begun working on her Thesis. The few stock investments Ray had were unexpectedly growing in the face of the declining stock markets. They should have, he only bought gold stocks. When the DIA ended her assignment, Sandra resigned and became a teaching assistant at the college. Sandra began to workout, although at a much lower pace.

With the modifications to the shelter entrance done, Ray had the same contractor build a 4 stall detached garage. Rather than buying a small freezer for the cabin, he bought a 21ft³ upright and refrigerator/freezer for the cabin and darn near killed himself getting the chest, the refrigerator (only) and a 4 way combination sink, stove, oven and microwave into the shelter. He ordered a side of beef and a whole hog and added a half case of frozen chickens. There was just enough room left for a few packages of frozen vegetables and frozen potatoes. He also added a full case of 1-pound ground round tubes to the big freezer.

He had been thinking for some time about Sandra and went to a local jeweler and picked out rings. The following weekend, they went to the same Jewelry store where he bought her a friendship ring for her birthday. It was the only way he could figure out how to get her ring size without asking. Sandra dwelled, starting longingly at the engagement rings and wedding sets. The jeweler told him his other package would be ready on Tuesday morning.

Tuesday morning, found Ray leaving on a jet plane on yet another assignment. This assignment was very unusual and screamed illegal. He told Sandra about it when he returned and suggested that she pass the information to the DIA, just because. He had the rings and was biding his time to pop the question. Sandra had been hinting for the past few months that they should take the next step. A sniper’s greatest asset is patience. Finally with all of the oversized goods in the shelter, his preparations completed by adding the chain saws, oil and parts he proposed over dinner at the cabin. Sandra said yes almost before he finished the question. Then, she began talking about children.

They moved her things to the cabin's second bedroom. She told him that they'd waited this long and a little longer couldn't hurt. She also revealed that the information he'd passed to her was what the DIA had been looking for, without going into details.

"Why four stalls? Do you do everything four at a time?"

"Does that mean I can have 4 wives?"

"In a pig's eye."

"Darn. When I ordered the garage, I included two stalls for my vehicles, one for yours and one spare."

"But, you only have the Suburban."

"Here's the garage opener, why don't you park your car in the garage."

When she returned some time later, she said, "What in the name of God is that?"

"A Hummer."

"Obviously, but with a ring mount? The government destroys vehicles like that."

"It's a retrofitted 2006 H-1 Alpha."

"Boy, I'll say. It's sure not stock with the motor upgrades, bullet resistant glass and large fuel tank. The only thing it's missing is a Ma Deuce and a SINCGARS Radio."

"It has exactly the same radios as my Suburban and soon your car."

"About that, the car is late model with a computer. I was considering getting a Wrangler or Grand Wagoneer and having the motor replaced with a non-electronic diesel."

"Let's eat lunch and go car shopping. Be sure to clean out your personal items."

The vehicle they bought was a 2009 Jeep Grand Cherokee Overland which cost more than the Suburban but a whole lot less than the Hummer. She traded her car in and Ray made up the difference between the final price and the money she had saved for the new vehicle.

"I'll take it to get the engine swapped and a few extras added. Meanwhile, you can drive my Suburban."

Ray – Chapter 7

“Ok. When do you want to get married?”

“Just as soon as we meet the legal requirements and can find a judge. Or, did you want a church wedding?”

“A judge is fine, it’s not like we make it to church every Sunday. One of the benefits of our both being Methodists, I suppose. Your affiliation was in your file. Spring break is coming up.”

“Perfect, I have a job that will have me back in time. I switched from the Mk 23 to the USP and have the PPK in an ankle holster.”

“I lost my federal CCW when I quit the DIA.”

“Let’s see if I can remedy that. How would you like to travel for a living?”

“Doing what?”

“Being my bodyguard. It just came up after that last trip and I told them that it was my way or the highway.”

“They didn’t fire you?”

“Surprising, isn’t it?”

“Wouldn’t they provide one?”

“They offered, but I said I’d pick my own and if my candidate was acceptable, they could hire him.”

“Does it pay well?”

“You have no idea. However, just to keep things on the up and up, we’d have to get your hired before we got married.”

“I’m for it.”

“Given your background in the Corps, you’ll only need a week of classes while your federal CCW is processed. Is there any way you can quit your job?”

“I suppose I could use the family emergence excuse for an extended leave and then quit when the emergency requires me to move back home.”

“Where’s home?”

“Michigan.”

Specifically it was in the Upper Peninsula in a town named Newberry. Not the best choice if we ever had another Ice Age. Surprisingly Sandra didn't call her mother to tell her she was getting married. There had to be a story in that. She got the emergency leave and was hired by FedEx, completing her school before Ray's next assignment. After the school, they were married in a Judge's office.

Ray had the same thought that most men have after their honeymoon, “And, she cooks, too.” Sandra inherited the M82A1M and Ray switched to the dual purpose Payload Rifle. They added the AWC pistols in purpose built shoulder holsters and he got her a matching Walther, ankle holster and ankle magazine carrier. In her new role, Sandra wore slacks with a matching jacket, sort of a female version of a man's business suit made by Bluesuits of New York. The jackets require extensive modifications to conceal her USP and Badlander.

They were soon on a plane bound for Dallas to pick up a package bound for Denver where they were to pick up a second package bound for the same firm that made Ray nervous in LA. They had a package for the same firm in New York. When they returned, Sandra again called the DIA and told them about the deliveries plus the fact that Ray and she had married and she now traveled with him as his bodyguard. The DIA knew all about it when the FedEx request came in for her federal CCW. They offered to put her on a retainer as an independent contractor to continue the reports. She was able to negotiate a good fee (day rate plus expenses) with fulltime benefits.

Then, she got pregnant. FedEx wanted to terminate her and she threatened them with sexual harassment and a few more things that popped in her mind. They agreed to allow her to work through her 7th month and then take a minimum 4 month maternity leave. In her absence, they would find a replacement guard who met Ray's primary criteria, a former Marine.

Ray was, for all practical purposes, a wealthy, though not rich, prepper who had most of his preps complete. Being an expectant father changed that. They needed additional preps for the baby. They did it together, buying the supplies, shelf stable foods, etc. If they did ever end up in the shelter, the compact stacked washer and dryer would get a real workout with the cotton diapers.

As the US and the world seemed to be tipping ever closer to the brink, Sandra and Ray continued their jobs until she went on maternity leave. Ray was shocked when he learned that his new bodyguard would be his buddy Steve, GySgt, USMC, ret. Steve had been a fellow instructor at the sniper school. He and his family lived in upstate New York. Over time, Ray managed to get Steve to agree to move to the Burlington area. Steve concurred because, in part, of the New York gun laws.

“You're kind of old to be starting a family, aren't you?”

"I plan to live long enough to see all our children through college. Have you found a place in the Burlington area yet?"

"No. For two cents, I'd rent a lot from you and put in a triple wide mobile home with the desert package."

"Here's a quarter, keep the change."

"You're serious?"

"Aren't you?"

"Do you have room?"

"It's fifteen acres, we'll find room. Or, you could put in a basement and top it with a log home like I did."

"I think I like that better. How would we work it out?"

"I'll deed you an acre for, say \$500, and you're on your own after that. You can probably rent a singlewide mobile home to live in while the home is being constructed."

"What's the land worth?"

"Whatever I say it's worth. It would really improve the security on our little acreage if you moved there."

"Security?"

"Yeah, since I retired, I've become a survivalist/prepper. Got the shelter, food, a ton of weapons and ammo and a few things you kill to have."

"Speaking of weapons, did you know that the Corps is adopting the Barrett M109 Payload Rifle?"

"I figured they would."

"Do tell."

"I was given a chance to test the modified rifle after I wrote Barrett with a suggestion. Just between we Gunny's, I have one complete with the .50BMG upper, suppressors and fine optics. I need two more MUNS night scopes to round out the package."

"More?"

“Yeah, there’s one for the Tac-50 and one for my Super Match. When you see what I’ve amassed since I retired, you’ll probably have a heart attack. I could equip a full rifle squad. Why don’t you and the family come up the weekend after we’ve finished this job and check the place out?”

“I’ll check with Jan about that.”

o

Thus it became to be that Raymond (NMI) Johnson and Sandra Johnson, née Hughes, began what would evolve into an intentional community with Stephen R. Nelson, Janice Nelson, née Robinson, and their two children Stephen Jr. 16 and Melanie 14. The new cabin was erected by Vermont Home Specialties, Inc. of Danville, VT.

Raymond Jr. was 5 months old when the Nelsons took up residence. By this time, Ray’s friend had come through with the 25mm ammo, for a consideration. The consideration was simple, he was about to retire from the Corps with his 30 and wanted a building lot. Ray made him the same offer he made Steve.

Andrew M. Meyers, MGySgt, USMC, ret., was older than Ray and quite a bit older than Steve. Their kids were grown and off seeking a life of their own. Andy’s wife, Cynthia Meyers, née Smith, liked the new cabin that Steve and Jan were having constructed and Ray sold him an acre for \$500 on the other side of their cabin away from Steve and Jan. In turn, Steve made the referral and gave the kickback (finder’s fee) back to Andy so that he could spend some money on firearms.

Steve hadn’t had the expected heart attack when he saw the totality of Ray and Sandra’s armory, but it was a near thing involving a mop on the floor. When he asked Ray how he’d managed to buy the stuff, Ray said it was part inheritance, part frugality and knowing some low people in high places, like Andy, who supplied the ammo, etc.

Ray had no way of knowing that for every round or piece of ordnance Andy supplied him over the years, Andy kept a like amount for himself, including the 25mm ammo. Andy’s problem was that he didn’t have a M109 or even an M82. Ray learned this when Andy began unloading his Dodge 3500 and the U-Haul trailer behind it. Ray suggested consolidating the ammo in the shelter storage room. This is how Andy came to know about the large shelter and just where that bank vault door at the bottom of a set of stairs led to.

Ray slowly began to convert his gold stock into the actual metal, purchased for cash, off the books. When time came for Sandra to decide between being a stay at home mother or a bodyguard, Cindy agreed to baby sit and Sandra returned to work. Steve then advanced to being a courier in his own right, when he was replaced by Sandy.

One trip Ray and Sandy made took them to Nashville, with a layover. They rented a car and drove to Murfreesboro to talk to Chris Barrett. Ray flat out told Chris what he want-

ed, two identical rifles to the one that they'd delivered to him. Complete, he said, including the lack of serial numbers. Chris hemmed and hawed, eventually bemoaning the expense. Ray countered by offering to pay the manufacturer's cost plus shipment. Doubting Ray could afford it, Chris gave him a figure. Ray wrote him a check. No doubt a lot of gears turned and discussions were held; however eventually, Ray received six boxes via secure courier.

When Andy and Steve received their rifles they were astonished. Andy called a friend and acquired a supply of 25mm, Mk 211 and M1022 for Steve's rifle. You don't actually think they spend \$20,000.00 on a hammer, \$30,000.00 on a toilet seat do you? The military procurement system was so screwed up, a careful person could make all sorts of things disappear and blame it on the paperwork. Paperwork had become the nightmare of everyone in Logistics. And, there were a few people that took advantage of that.

Over the course of the next year, two things happened. One, the two other men filled in their armories; and, two, Sandy became pregnant a second time. In addition, the other two families acquired LTS foods and began to double buy at the grocery stores. The former went into the shelter and the latter into their basements. Steve and Andy also acquired upright freezers for their basements and filled them from the same butcher that Ray and Sandra used.

Andy had a ton of slightly used ALICE gear solving their LBE problem. Based on various stories on the forum's additional items were acquired, especially camping gear. Weather station instruments were added to the Monopole and vehicles equipped with radios, larger fuel tanks and non-electronic ignitions.

o

In late 2009, tensions were high. The economy was in the toilet, North Korea had tested yet another nuclear weapon (it actually worked) and Iran (suspected) had tested a nuclear device. Under Bibi, the Palestinian question had gotten worse rather than better. Between the economy, the new health care program, the renewal of the AWB and the new taxes, Steve, Ray and Sandy were having problems making ends meet, especially after Sandy went on maternity leave. Andy and Cindy were doing fine financially on his pension and their savings. They called what could only be described as a war council.

"Ray, I thought you were pretty well off. I don't know what your problem is Steve, so you'll have to tell me."

"Andy, we are well off, it's just a temporary bind until I either sell some gold or we cut our expenses."

"Andy, as I'm sure everyone realizes, it's hard with kids. Especially with two in high school and all the activities that take money. We're still double buying so we sort of have a rainy day fund as far as food goes."

Ray – Chapter 8

“Don’t worry about fuel, Steve; it wouldn’t hurt to rotate some of those 40,000-gallons of stabilized diesel. It’s mostly due to the cost of fuel and the wheat shortage because of that fungus.”

“Three bucks for a loaf of the cheap bread!”

“Honey, we can buy flour and I’ll bake bread. There’s not much we can do about \$4-a-gallon milk.” This came from Jan.

“It’s just a short term problem for us, too, Andy. The propane tank is full, wood and coal stacked, which ate into our cash. We’re still better off than we were on active duty, plus we have commissary privileges.”

“Well ok. Just make sure one of you tells me when it’s time.”

“Time for what?”

“Think about it, it will come to you.”

It was a very short war council as it turned out. Neither Ray nor Steve tripped to what Andy was referring to when he said to let him know when it was time. All three wives worked together to bake bread and share what little Jan’s garden produced.

“Ray, we need a garden. We should look into a greenhouse so it could be a year round garden. It wouldn’t hurt if we planted outside next year, too.”

“Ok Sandy, I’ll look into it. The greenhouse would definitely need a heater and probably grow lights.”

“I’m glad I’m still pulling in that DIA money. More importantly we have the full benefits.”

o

Ray found a Company in Fort Worth, Texas Greenhouse Company and they sold kits. He liked the American Classic and apparently the only limiting factor was how much money you had to spend. After Sandy and he discussed it, he got the Gunny Club together and discussed it a second time. They thought it was a great idea, BUT he’d have to go it alone.

Ray unloaded his gold stocks, selling every share. He converted the money into a greenhouse kit, 40’x120’. The remaining money went into their checking account so he could buy gold when the price came down to under \$1,000oz. Once a Marine, always a Marine and neither Andy nor Steve let him down when it came time to assemble the new greenhouse. Ray had to rent a cherry picker due to the height and broad span;

however, in time, the greenhouse was done. He was also the father of cute little baby girl they named Faith.

By this time it was time to plant the outside garden and the Gunny's Club rented a rototiller and churned up 3 ½-acre plots. The courier business picked up and both Steve and Ray were gone more often than not. Sandy decided to be a stay-at-home mother and tend her gardens. The outside garden was planted with the usual crops, sweet corn, tomatoes, green beans, potatoes, onions, beets, peppers, etc. using hybrid seeds or starter plants from a nursery. The greenhouse was planted in heirloom seeds and the majority of the seeds were saved. Not trusting buying the heirloom seeds from a sole source, she used several.

One night after returning from a ten stop trip, Ray was sitting in his cubbyhole thinking. He'd come to realize that life wasn't fair and that money wasn't everything. Money could buy you lovin' but not the love of a good woman. He also realized that that judge had done him a favor by allowing him to join the Corps and wiping his record clean instead of throwing him in jail. He was lost in thought when Sandy crept up behind him and planted a kiss on his head.

"What brought that on?"

"Nothing; just because."

"You throw good pups, you know."

"How many are we going to have, a full litter?"

"We have a fine son and a beautiful daughter; who could ask for anything more?"

"Good, I have my hands full. I'll get an implant."

(Sandy's doctor had recommended Implanon, which was good for 3 years and appeared to be more effective than Norplant. The original Norplant had been phased out and the Norplant II was awaiting final approval.)

Faith started to cry and Sandy left to feed her. Ray resumed his ruminations. They had a shelter, equipment, food but the shelter left a lot to be desired in terms of privacy. He could only squeeze in one more bedroom and having the other two take turns using one bedroom wasn't a good idea. Maybe he could turn one of the bunkrooms into a private bedroom and Steve's two kids could share the same room. And, that question about the time still lingered.

The Gunny's Club met briefly and discussed the bedroom problem. Steve didn't think it would be a problem. To be on the safe side, he'd mention it to Jan. Unless he said differently, it was a go.

Ray went to get the building materials and had a thought. There was more than enough room in the storage room to put up the bunks from one bunkroom, should the need arise. The more he thought about, the better he liked it, Steve Jr. would probably love to campout in the storage room. After the lumberyard, he went by the furniture store and ordered a pair of dressers and two queen sized beds. When he got back, he set the rototiller to shallow and made a quick pass through the garden to knock down the weeds. Next, he got the hoe to get between the plants.

That evening, Fox News carried a special about recent seismological activity. It started in Cascadia, which apparently led to nominal activity on the San Andreas and significant activity in Yellowstone. More interesting was the fact that several of the volcanoes in the Cascade Range were putting out steam and putting out sharply increased seismic activity. Ray mentioned it to Sandy and went online to check what Wiki had to say about the areas mentioned by Fox. Next, he moved to the USGS website. He absently turned on his SAME radio and hit the button for All Alerts. (It wouldn't matter if something really big happened because of the mandatory protocols including the EAN.)

The SAME radio in the shelter was the Honeywell TN924W Weather Station with Public Alert Weather Radio with SAME. His bedroom radio was the Oregon Scientific WRB603 Public Alert Weather Radio. The radio was powered from a wall transformer and had Energizer Lithium backup batteries.

The next assignment came in and it was for Seattle; plus it was optional. Ray remembered the Fox News Special and declined. Instead, he hung around home and helped with the garden. Some might say he was displaying an abundance of caution. Others might say he was overly concerned. Maybe it was just a healthy dose of common sense.

Canning Pantry was surprised by the size of his order, 4 gross of boxes of quarts and 2 gross of boxes of pints plus 3 cases of lids and an assortment of spices. Finally, he added another 30 quart Pressure Canner. Worried that something might happen before he received the large order, he went shopping in Burlington for canning jars and lids. Ray managed to locate an addition gross of quarts and the same of pints. When his order came in, he'd have 8,640 new quarts, 5,184 new pints and 180 dozen replacement lids... not counting their stock on hand.

A garden encompassing $\frac{1}{2}$ acre covers 21,780ft² or about 100' wide by 218' long. When he looked at it closely, he began to wonder if he'd have enough jars. The Canning Pantry order arrived within the week and they filled the empty garage stall with boxes of jars, lids and untold supplies.

Sandy went on her own leaving him to babysit and bought the things he'd overlooked like salt, sugar, pectin and the other things like additional feminine hygiene supplies. She also added to their assortment of OTC meds. When she returned home, she busied herself on the computer, ordering several items from EMS including ACS, battle dressings plus some prescription items that her doctor has prescribed for her like IV sets,

500ml bags of normal saline and D5W to bulk up blood in case of severe bleeding. She had taken and passed the Combat Life Saver program. Too say the least, she had an extensive first aid kit.

When canning season began, it involved countless 10-14 hour days. When the lids pinged and the jars had cooled, the three members of the Wives' Club divided the filled boxes between the shelter and their basements. Ray had assembled the basement shelving and anchored it to the wall plus added the requested bar to keep the jars on the shelves. In Ray's view, they'd over planted potatoes because he ended up with 13 100-pound bags.

After checking the freezers, he moved the contents from the shelter freezer upstairs and ordered the beef, pork, chicken and prepared potatoes to refill the shelter freezer. He also divided and stacked the extra coffee, tea and more cigarettes from the Res. Finally, he checked their ammo supplies and ordered enough to replenish their supplies.

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In January of 2010, a US naval vessel stopped a North Korean vessel in disputed waters. The initial response was posturing by both sides. North Korea threatened and the White House and State Department called for an emergency session of the Security Council. Satellites noted the absence of all Chinese submarines from their new base. For its part Russia remained neutral. The US kicked up the Defense Condition to 3 and Homeland Security raised the threat level to Orange.

Ray called and got the diesel, gasoline and propane tanks topped off. He took each of their three 3 vehicles to be serviced and picked up extra oil and filters. The same went for his Kohler generator, oil, and filters. The preparations didn't miss the attention of the Gunny's Club or the wives' Club. However, it wasn't until he went to the Colchester, Vermont Costco warehouse that they got really interested. The solo trip ended up in including all three families. The teens remained behind, to babysit.

Ray's list was fairly short, coffee, bulk ground beef, vegetable oils, assorted spices and personal hygiene products like toothpaste, razors and shaving soap. The wives and the other two men made a few purchases of their own. Once finished, the others returned home and Ray headed for the Res. This time the order was evenly divided between Marlboro and Kool's, 30 cartons each.

On February 14th, 2010, 3 North Korea PTG Komar class missile craft fired on the US ships and the US Destroyers sunk all 3 ships with return fire. North Korea postured over the attack by US Destroyers within its home waters. The US countered proclaiming that the North Korean ships were 50 nautical miles beyond the North Korean coast. North Korea went to their highest state of alert and the US countered by raising the DEFCON to 2 and the threat level to red. The George Washington Strike Group sailed for Korean waters, the Reagan Strike Group sailed north from the South China Sea and the Nimitz Strike Group left North Island 4 days later, the time being necessary to stock the ships

and recall personnel. Two additional very large submarines altered their course to bring them closer to Korea. All three Seawolf type submarines moved at full speed to the Far East. The activities of the Washington and Reagan didn't get reported. The Nimitz's activities were reported.

Andy spent hours on the phone collecting information, none of it good. The Gunny's network is about the same as the Chief's network and they've been known to share information. While Andy was tied up on the phone, clothing and other personal items were moved to the shelter, just in case. Ray ran his list of last minute items and rushed off to buy a second crib or youth bed, additional baby food and he found time to pick up a dozen roses, heavily marked up.

North Korea failed to carry out its threat to attack the US ships with nukes. The US began pulling its forces from Afghanistan, Japan and South Korea, with all possible haste. The Yankees were heeding the call of the crowds and were going home. As had been the pattern all through the Cold War and the 20 years since it ended, the countries involved backed off, one more time. The only difference was the absence of the world's policemen as the soldiers came home and the Carrier Strike Groups returned to their home ports.

That left the George Washington CSG as the only overseas combat force. The Seawolf type submarines didn't re-transit the Panama Canal. No one noticed that the Ohio class boomers were missing. While typically, half the boomers were in port, it now was only 4 in port at once. Only a very select few knew that the tridents had been refitted with 12 warheads. There were times when the government could still keep a secret.

◦

Back at home, the Cascade chain was becoming extremely active. Satellite data indicated that the subduction zone remained locked up. The USGS reported that their monitoring of the subduction zone and the Cascade Range indicate a possible rupture and consequential volcanic eruptions. The report included the well-known fact that significant activity in Cascadia would most likely trigger the San Andreas. Yellowstone continued to rise and there was concern that, should Cascadia slip, there was a 2% chance of it triggering Yellowstone into another Supervolcano eruption.

“Are you still walking around with that portable NOAA radio?”

Ray – Chapter 9

“Sometimes technology can save your butt.”

“Are we going shooting this weekend?”

“Use it or lose it. I’d go even in the middle of winter with 10’ of snow on the ground, if I could get to the quarry.”

“Are the two of you healthy financially, now?”

“I am. Steve can speak for himself.”

“We’re good, thanks for asking. That trip to the Dakotas was smart; we have enough wheat and beans to last for years. Getting a pickup load of Thai rice from Costco didn’t hurt either.”

“Is Steve going to college in Burlington next year?”

“Burlington. He decided to go there because he could live at home. Otherwise, it would have been a trade school or the military. He said he wasn’t interested in seeing any elephants that weren’t in a zoo or on TV.”

“Smart kid.”

“Nothing wrong with his common sense, at least.”

“Let me remind both of you again; I have 4 of each of my guns except for the 870 and Barrett’s. Since each of you now has a Barrett, a main battle rifle, an assault rifle or carbine, combat shotgun and pistols, we’re good on firearms. Thanks to Andy, we’re very well stocked on ammo and ordnance. All the tanks are topped off and we don’t have room to store anymore food. Which is why I’m wearing my NOAA radio, it’s the things you can’t see that can kill you.”

“What do you do in your free time, pray?”

“I try to follow the news consistently. When an unusual story is in the news, I research it. I tried to check on the status of our Navy and ran into a block wall. It’s nearly impossible to access dot mil and dot gov websites, with exceptions. NOAA and the USGS sites are open, but slow. I believe they’re getting heavy traffic.”

“History Channel is rerunning the Mega Disasters series.”

“I’ve been taping them.”

“Anyone want another beer?”

“I’ve got to get home and tuck in Ray and Faith.”

“I’m going home and tuck in Jan.”

A 40’x120’ greenhouse has 4,800ft² and is double the size of many gardens. This greenhouse only grew plants using heirloom seeds. Having selected what she thought produced the best results; Sandy stored a large quantity of those particular seeds and a lesser quantity of the others. Other seeds were stored in their basement including hard winter red and durum wheat, oats, lentils and other field crops that could be grown in Vermont soil and normal weather.

Waiting to settle down had been one of the best decisions of her life. She ended up with, in her view, Mr. Perfect. They had two wonderful, healthy, growing children. It was the opposite of her life growing up at home. Her father and mother were both drunks, and probably still were. Her older sister had run away at 16, saying the abuse was bad enough, but the late night visits had to end. Sandy bought a key lockset for her bedroom door and somehow managed to avoid the visits. She’d left home as soon as she graduated, with full scholarships for UM, and took a job in Ann Arbor during the summer.

She went to school fulltime beginning that fall, while keeping a part-time job. Working fulltime in the summers and part-time during the school year allowed her to continue to live off campus. Upon graduation, she’d been unable to find a decent job and had enlisted in the Marine Corps. She’d done 2 tours in Iraq and didn’t get so much as a scratch. Once out, she went to work for the DIA as an analyst. However, circumstance had her in the field on a low key assignment tracking Raymond Johnson; more specifically the packages he delivered. The rest was history.

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Cindy wasn’t as much into shooting as Jan and Sandy. Once Andy retired and they moved to their new log home, that changed. Not that there was a requirement forcing her to learn to shoot, but learn she did. She learned to shoot every firearm on the property. Her favorites were the Browning Hi-Power classic and gas piston Bushmaster M4. She, too, acquired a Galco purse for the Browning. The pistol had been worked on by a gunsmith and would feed any round and the trigger was as smooth as silk. As with all of the residents, she used Gold Dot 124gr +P.

Jan was in some ways like Cindy other than she hadn’t gone to college. She’d met Steve and they really hit it off. Almost before she realized it, she was married. The babies didn’t come immediately, but they came. She was a sometimes shooter, familiar with the use and care of every firearm Steve owned or could borrow. She’d only known Ray in passing, enough to say hi. He was extremely reserved, seldom drank, didn’t smoke and seemed to spend the majority of his time alone. The one time they’d gone out to dinner with him, he’d picked up the check. His wallet was bulging and it looked like mostly hundreds. But, for all she knew, it could have been a Chicago bankroll (a roll of

money, consisting entirely of singles, with the exception of a large bill wrapped around the outside).

Ray actually had the money in his wallet because he was going to the coin dealer the following day to purchase more Krugerrands. He typically carried about \$100 in divided among ones, fives, tens and twenties. He'd pulled the money from his savings account Friday after work and didn't trust leaving it in his quarters at the BEQ.

o

The first written appearance of the proverb "revenge is a dish best served cold" is often credited to the 18th century novel *Les liaisons dangereuses* ("La vengeance est un plat qui se mange froid"). The phrase, "Revenge is a dish best served cold", was actually borrowed by the British from the Pashtuns and popularized in the West, directing its original source to Afghanistan. The English version of this phrase in that exact wording can be attributed to *The Godfather* by Mario Puzo, a major bestseller in 1969. However, the phrase appeared in the 1949 film *Kind Hearts and Coronets* as "revenge is a dish which people of taste prefer to eat cold". The more well-known wording of this quote is also featured in the title sequence of the Quentin Tarantino film *Kill Bill: Vol 1*, accredited as an "Old Klingon Proverb", referencing the phrase's usage in *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*, where it is similarly cited as such. It means that to be successful, revenge should be a considered and planned response enacted when the time is right, rather than a hasty and hot-blooded action which will increase the chances of failure.

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One day in April, 2010, a car pulled in at the acreage and an old man got out. He asked to speak to Ray. Steve got Ray and Ray went to meet the man.

"Remember me?"

"You've gotten old. I don't recognize you, but I'll never forget the voice. Judge Jenkins if I'm not mistaken."

"I haven't been a judge for quite some time, but you do remember."

"It's difficult to forget someone who turned my life upside down. I wasn't even driving!"

"You should have been behind the wheel and maybe, just maybe, the accident would have been avoided. My decision considered both facts and that's the only reason I gave you a choice. You didn't know about me, but I'm Colonel Roger Jenkins, USMC, ret. I followed your career, when I could. You done your country a real service and I'm proud of how you turned out."

"Fine. What can I do for you Colonel?"

“Could you offer an old man a seat?”

Ray was reluctant but took the old Colonel into the cabin and offered him a seat at the kitchen table. Call it professional courtesy. Sandra came in and he introduced her to Colonel Jenkins. Sandra knew who Colonel Jenkins was; it had been in Ray’s file at the DIA. She offered them coffee, poured and made herself scarce.

“Like I said, what can I do for you Colonel?”

“I thought you’d stay in for the full 30. You were up for promotion.”

“So I’ve been told. I paid my debt, in full, and then some. I did hard time for 20 years and played by the rules. You seemed to overlook the Bible passage, ‘Revenge is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord’.”

“Romans 12:19 NKJ.”

“Actually, in the long run, I believe in my heart that you did me a favor.”

“I’m happy you feel that way. Now, to answer your question, would you be willing to sell this old man a one acre lot as you have your other two Marine Corps friends?”

“You’re asking a lot, Colonel.”

“Well, it was a thought. I’m sorry I bothered you.”

“I didn’t say no. Did you actually see any combat during your service career?”

“Some, Vietnam; I was a green butter bar.”

“How are your eyes?”

“What?”

“How are your eyes? Can you still see to shoot a rifle?”

“I can see well enough, but it has been a very long time since I’ve fired a rifle or a pistol for that matter.”

“Once a Marine, always a Marine, right Colonel?”

“Ooh-rah, Gunny.”

“Is it time yet?”

“To implement Gunny Highway’s motto? I don’t know, maybe.”

“So that’s what he meant.”

“That’s what who meant?”

“MGySgt Andy Meyers, one of the other residents. It never occurred to me. The movie was crap, but the motto should be taught in Boot Camp.”

“Maybe so.”

“All right, one acre, \$500 cash money and you built a matching log cabin with a full basement and stock the recommended supplies.”

“You have a MAG?”

“I hadn’t thought of it in those terms. I was thinking an intentional community. Maybe a MAG does apply.”

“Is there a buy in?”

“In a way. You need the house, supplies and weapons. That should be enough of a buy in. Is that a problem?”

“No, I sold my home when the housing market began its downward spiral. It’s just me now and I have a furnished apartment in Santa Clarita. I’m not wealthy, but I bought cheap and sold high.”

“Good plan Colonel. Do you have to return to California?”

“No. What little I had was boxed up and shipped to Burlington. I took a chance...”

“One last question. How do you feel about the 2nd Amendment?”

“Heller didn’t go far enough. They should have invalidated the NFA and everything since.”

“Welcome aboard sir.”

o

The Colonel went on the other side of Andy and Cindy. With Ray’s help and guidance, he got the home built, the supplies lain in and acquired a used Dodge Ram 3500 and it was retrofitted with a non-electronic diesel engine. The firearms presented a bit of a problem. Over the course of the summer of 2010, the Colonel joined the others at the quarry and became comfortable and adept with HK416, Mossberg 590A1 and the Browning Hi-Power classic. The M82 was too heavy for his tired old muscles.

Ray – Chapter 10

Using the Colonel's money, Ray acquired a NIB select fire HK416 with suppressor, the 590A1 and Browning Hi-Power. The same gunsmith worked on the new Hi-Power and made it a sweet shooting pistol that could digest anything. Ray also ended up buying an unrecorded PPK for the Colonel in a private purchase. The only problem with the Hi-Powers, the lack of threaded barrels, was quickly remedied and 9mm suppressors were acquired.

On those occasions where they fired the M109s, Ray drove the Hummer to the quarry and they fired practice rounds from the ring mount. They often switched the uppers and fired a few rounds of .50BMG from the mount and then a few more from the ground. The M33 had long since been used up and the brass saved. None of the men were into reloading although they had the equipment and supplies, just in case. They had vast stores of ammo and ordnance; enough that Ray was forced to build a bunker.

This time, he used a different contractor both to spread the business around and maintain a degree of privacy. As it was, it was bad enough that the contractor knew about the shelter and retrofit. Knowing was one thing; accessing was a wholly different matter. The contractor hadn't been asked to install the blast hatch as Sandra suggested. A different contractor was used to connect the new stairway to a new tunnel topped with the blast hatch. The fiberglass rock was used to cover the relocated, internally locked, hatch.

For an old man, the Colonel got around. He frequently attended dances at a senior center. He met and married a lady more his own age, Joanne Collins. She had buried two husbands to his one wife. He jokingly referred to her as 'The Merry Widow'. Joanne was the only native Vermonter. As an older member of Vermont society, she was very conservative and fit in well with the group at the acreage.

One night in late 2010, Ray's NOAA radio sounded off. It was an EAN and was reporting that Cascadia had slipped causing a massive earthquake in Seattle and had, apparently, caused some of the volcanoes in the Cascade Range to erupt. Ray and Sandy got up, dressed and she started the coffee urn. Within 30 minutes, all of the others had migrated to their cabin. They were just in time to hear the new broadcast about the San Andreas.

"Man, am I glad I'm not in Santa Clarita."

"This could get bad," Andy suggested.

"How?"

"Well...you've got the tsunami, the quake in Seattle, the quake on the San Andreas and all of those volcanoes erupting. That will put thousands or millions of tons of ash in the

air. Now, if it spreads to Yellowstone as some have suggested, it will be Katy bar the door.”

o

There are only two places in the United States where colliding tectonic plates could cause a major tsunami, and new studies show a new earthquake in at least one of these locations could be imminent.

The Cascadia subduction zone, a 680-mile fault that runs 50 miles off the coast of the Pacific Northwest – from Cape Mendocino in California to Vancouver Island in southern British Columbia – has experienced a cluster of four massive earthquakes during the past 1,600 years. Scientists are trying to figure out if it is about to undergo a massive shift one more time before entering a quiescent period.

“People need to know it could happen,” said US Geological Survey geologist Brian Atwater.

The historical record for this zone, which has the longest recorded data about its earthquakes of any major fault in the world, shows that earthquakes occur in clusters of up to five events, with an average time interval of 300 years between quakes, said Chris Goldfinger, a marine geologist at Oregon State University. Goldfinger and other scientists have been studying this subduction zone for many years.

The two most recent quakes on this fault occurred in the year 1700 (a magnitude 9 event) and approximately the year 1500. It has now been 305 years since the last event. So is the Cascadia subduction zone finished for now or on the brink of event number five?

“We know quite a bit about the periodicity of this fault zone and what to expect,” he said. “But the key point we don't know is whether the current cluster of earthquake activity is over yet, or does it have another event left in it.”

The Cascadia subduction zone occurs where the relatively thin Juan de Fuca plate moves eastward and under the westward-moving North American Plate. When that collision results in a rupture, massive earthquakes occur. The other active subduction zone capable of producing a major earthquake-tsunami sequence is in Alaska, the site of a giant earthquake and subsequent tsunami in 1964.

Scientists say a rupture along the Cascadia fault would cause the sea floor to bounce 20 feet or more, setting off powerful ocean waves relatively close to shore. The first waves could hit coastal communities in 30 minutes or less – too rapidly for the current warning systems to save lives.

A tsunami along the Atlantic Coast is considered extremely unlikely.

Tsunamis are the result of sudden rises or falls in a section of the earth's crust under or near the ocean, usually caused by earthquakes, volcanic activity or landslides.

Earthquakes at subduction zones (rather than at other types of faults such as thrust faults) produce the highest energy tsunamis, especially when they occur in deep water. The seismic activity displaces sea water, creating a rise or fall in the level of the ocean above. This rise or fall in sea level initiates the formation of a tsunami wave. The wave's height increases in shallower water.

Geologists can track earthquakes back in time by radiocarbon dating deposits of sand called turbidities, which come from undersea landslides.

Major studies on the Cascadia fault zone have identified 19 to 21 major earthquake events during the past 10,000 years. During at least 17 of these events, the entire fault zone probably ruptured at once, causing an earthquake around magnitude 9 and major tsunamis, such as those which savaged East Asia last week.

The Asian event happened where the India plate was subducted beneath the Burma micro plate. It ruptured, for the first time since 1833, along a 600-mile front just about the same length as the Cascadia Subduction Zone.

The Asian event may provide a shocking demonstration of the geologic future of the Pacific Northwest, Goldfinger said. For hundreds of years, subduction zone plates remain locked in place, releasing little tension. Every few centuries, in a few minutes of violence, forces are released as the upper plate moves seaward, producing a massive tsunami following earthquake shaking.

"In the case of the Cascadia Subduction Zone, you could have an area of ocean floor that's 50 miles wide and 500 to 600 miles long suddenly snap back, causing a huge tsunami," Goldfinger said. "At the same time, we could expect some parts of the upper, or North American, plate to sink one to two meters. These are massive tectonic events. Subduction zones produce the most powerful earthquakes and tsunamis in the world."

The question is not whether, but when the Cascadia Subduction Zone will break again.

"One possibility is that we could be done with this cluster and looking at a period of many hundreds of years before the next earthquake," Goldfinger said. "The other distinct possibility is we could still be in a cluster of events. If that's the case, the average time interval between earthquakes within a cluster is already up. We would be due just about any day."

o

"But what about Long Valley?"

"What about Long Valley, Steve?"

“Could it erupt too? I mean, there’s been all that die off of trees due to carbon dioxide or something.”

“Don’t go looking for trouble.”

“I’m just saying that high concentrations of carbon dioxide (CO₂) in soil gas are killing trees on the flanks of Mammoth Mountain at the southwestern edge of Long Valley Caldera. First noted in 1990, the areas of tree kill now total about 170 acres in six general areas, including the most visually impressive tree-kill area adjacent to Horseshoe Lake on the south side of Mammoth Mountain. The soil gas in the tree-kill areas is composed of 20 to 90 percent CO₂; there is less than 1 percent CO₂ in soils outside the tree-kill areas.”

“If Yellowstone and Long Valley both erupted, we sure as heck wouldn’t need World War Three. Next thing you know, someone will be telling me that the New Madrid Fault Zone will let loose in response to the Cascadia event.”

“Now, who is looking for trouble?”

“I was just saying...”

“We all know what you were saying, Ray. You’re right about us not needing a war on top of everything else.”

o

Kim Jong-un watched the unfolding events in the US with a mixture of fascination, horror and delight. Nature unleashed was far more capable than anything one country could do to another. It was to say the least, fascinating. He felt horror at the effects of the tsunami that reached the eastern shores of Korea. Delight that he wouldn’t have to proceed with the planned actions against the US. His intelligence services indicated that the George Washington Group began getting ready to sail when the first news of the tsunami came in. They had remained in Yokosuka until the tsunamis had passed and had departed as soon as possible thereafter, returning to the US.

Phase two of his plan had been an attack on Japan to achieve revenge for the WW II occupation and their assistance of the Americans during the early ‘50s. Like his father and grandfather, Kim Jong-un had an appetite that far exceeded the size of his stomach. His intelligence apparatus may have been good, but it wasn’t as good as he presumed. No one but the Japanese knew that Japan was the newest member of the nuclear club. Even better, given the Japanese talent for making things small, they had weapons smaller than and more powerful than anyone else in the world.

Japan wasn’t alone in their quest. Some of the finest Engineers in the world are found in Germany. The Teller-Ulam design was on Wikipedia, for crying out loud. Using derived

plutonium and the other components from German industry, they too, had developed nuclear weapons. Much as the Japanese, their weapon had been tested at 20,000+ feet deep in an ocean trench. Neither knew of the other's activities, for had they, a second Axis alliance might have been formed.

Germany's electricity production in 2007 was 637 billion kWh gross, about 6300 kWh per capita. Coal provides about half of the country's electricity. Gas supplied 12%, wind 6% in 2007. Electricity exports exceed imports by about 15 billion kWh.

The country's 17 operating nuclear power reactors, comprising 20.6% of installed capacity, supply about one quarter of the electricity (133 billion kWh net in 2007). Many of the units are large (they total 20,339 MWe), and the last came into commercial operation in 1989. Six units are boiling water reactors (BWR), 11 are pressurized water reactors (PWR). All were built by Siemens-KWU. A further PWR has not operated since 1988 because of a licensing dispute.

o

During the course of the conversation that night into morning, Ray recalled something that TOM wrote in his stories, "Be careful of what you wish for because God has a sense of humor." He figured with his luck, he may well have been trapped in Seattle when Cascadia let loose. However, Ray had resigned as a courier after a series of events. First, more than one courier had been killed for their package; and second FedEx insisted that he take the packages assigned to him, regardless. With their now minimal expenses and a family to care for, Ray began to rely solely on his military pension. It was enough, just, to maintain their current lifestyle.

"There it goes again."

"Turn up the volume."

...continuing the previous series of announcements, presumably due to the earthquake on the San Andreas, Long Valley has begun to display increased seismic activity. Local residents are advised to evacuate immediately. The current status of Long Valley is Yellow.

"What does Yellow mean?"

"Yellow means that a volcano is exhibiting signs of elevated unrest above known background level; or, after a change from a higher level, volcanic activity has decreased significantly but continues to be closely monitored for possible renewed increase."

Ray – Chapter 11

“What about Yellowstone?”

“They haven’t said anything about Yellowstone. If I recall correctly, after the 1964 Alaska Quake, Yellowstone experienced increased activity. As Andy said, if and when one of those two or both go, it will be Katy bar the door time.”

“What then?”

“Well, I’ll tell Andy that it’s Gunny Highway time.”

“You figured it out, did you?”

“The Colonel tipped me to it; stupid movie, good concept.”

“So who made the better DI, Jack Webb or Clint Eastwood?”

“That’s easy, Gunny Highway wasn’t a DI and Technical Sergeant Jim Moore was.”

(Technical Sergeant was also a technical rank in the USMC until 1958. From 1941 until 1946, the rank was equivalent to grade 2, ranking with Gunnery Sergeant and other technical ranks with which it shared its insignia. From 1947 until 1958, the rank was reclassified as E-6 and became the sole rank in this grade. The rank was renamed Gunnery Sergeant and elevated to E-7 after the reorganization of grades in 1959.)

“I liked Jack Webb more than Clint. He did fair with his in the face crap. Not bad for a guy who wasn’t in the military.”

“He wasn’t?”

“Asthma; got two stars on the Walk of Fame. I wonder if there is still a Walk of Fame.”

“It’s probably still there but may be a bit cracked.”

“What I’d like to know is what we’re going to do about the situation.”

“Each time we acquired additional residents, I increased our supply of PPE. There is enough for everyone plus a little extra. While we haven’t reloaded, I’ve kept all of the brass and have supplies to reload the ammo four or five times presuming we can figure out how to do it. Everyone has at least a one year supply of LTS food, not counting our homed canned goods. I assume that most of your freezers are full and should we lose power, the generator should be enough to keep the freezers cold and the heat up to 55° so the pipes won’t freeze. That’s one of our greatest dangers, frozen pipes, this far north.

“You’ve all seen the shelter and must realize that it only has 3 bedrooms plus the bunk-room. If Steve and Jan agree, we can move the bunks to the storage room, and use the extra mattresses for beds in the empty bunk room. Steve Jr. and Melanie will just have to double up in the storage room. Maybe we can rig a curtain to give them minimal privacy. As soon as we’re getting signs of ash, we’ll have to get in the shelter. Absent any radiation hazard, the radio should still work, although I don’t know how well.”

“What PPE?”

“Millennium gas masks with CBRN filters, Tyvek suits, boots, gloves, tape and a few of the OptimAir 6A PAPR blowers. The suits are Tychem SL - High Performance Saranex Chemical Suits. There are plenty of the ESP II Voice amplifiers. We have both Chemical Agent Detector Kit M256A1 and HazMat Smart-Strip Chemical Detection Badges. There are similar supplies for the children and teens.”

“Most of that is geared toward a nuclear, biological or chemical attack.”

“I know that, but it’s what we have. With 8 adults, 2 teens and 2 adolescents, space is going to be at a premium. Still, the average space will be on the order of 100ft² per person so we should get by. I’d like to suggest that we empty our refrigerator and move it to the shelter for group use. We could move one of the upright freezers, if you want and store extra frozen food.”

“How long, do you think?”

“I don’t know. The most correct answer would probably be until it’s over. Don’t forget your firearms and ammo.”

o

Kim Jong-un was, above all else, patient. With the American troops being recalled worldwide, he had time to move his few nukes to his supply of IRBMs. Only when the Americans were approaching the US would he begin the phase two, the attack on Japan. Another failing of tin pot dictators is their inability to listen to constructive criticism. Absent a direct attack against its forces, he presumed that the ultra-liberal American president would ring his hands and do his best to avoid any involvement.

What he should have considered was the statement attributed to Yamamoto after Pearl Harbor about waking a sleeping giant and filling it with a terrible resolve. Many on his military staff agreed with Yamamoto, but none had the courage to speak up; another problem attributed to tin pot dictators. He might have considered firing a Taep'o-dong-2 (TD-2) if there was any hope one might make it to Alaska.

China’s plans included taking the Spratly Islands and moving on to capture strategic reserves in Micronesia. If that went according to plan, the next target would either be Taiwan or Australia; both were on the table although most thought it would be Taiwan.

Were the target Australia, China would be up against the entire United Kingdom. Taiwan could only count on the US and possibly Japan. China decided to urge the North Korean attack on Japan, leaving it free to deal with Taiwan. Wanting Taiwan's assets as badly as control of the country, they decided to use enhanced radiation weapons (ERW) aka neutron bombs/warheads.

Assuming that they had at least two days before ash would become a problem the group took their time and moved all of the upright freezers and additional refrigerators down to the shelter. All LTS food supplies and home canned goods were also moved, leaving a set of narrow passageways in the storage room. They had to knock down the extra bunks to make room. Vehicles were garaged and the garages and homes sealed to the extent possible. They worked nonstop until they were as prepared as possible. Only then did they enter the shelter for an extended stay.

Ray had always intended on installing a CCTV camera on the Monopole. He even bought the camera, but the installer had been ill and it slipped Ray's mind. He'd installed the cable and had the monitor on his radio table. Thinking that laying the camera somewhere and connecting it was better than no camera; he opened the lower blast door and hauled the camera up to the upper blast door at the top of the stairs. As soon as he began opening the door, ash began drift in and he abandoned the idea.

Steve offered to suit up and place the camera when Ray explained what had happened. Ray countered with them both suiting up, roping themselves together and to the door, just in case. Ray produced a roll of duct tape and suggested they try to tape the camera to the Monopole where the coiled up CCTV cable was attached.

It was an eerie sight that greeted them. It was nearly noon and as dark as the bowels of Hades. They realized that something was wrong with the scene before them. They found the Monopole almost by chance, hurriedly installed and connected the camera and followed the rope back to the blast door. At the lower level before the tunnel turned, they tripped the decontamination shower and washed the ash off.

"What was it like up there?"

"I could barely see my hand at arm's length. Something's not right. Can you see anything on the monitor?"

"It's almost black, are you sure it's on?"

"It's on. You're seeing what we saw. How come the Honeywell weather station radio didn't issue more warnings?"

"Let me check. Oh here, the surge protector was tripped."

"But I bought the Lithium backup batteries."

“Did you buy extras?”

“No, why do you ask?”

“Because, sweetheart, the batteries are on the table.”

“Crap. Sometimes I think I’d lose my head if it weren’t attached. Let’s reset the surge protector and install the batteries. What about regular broadcast radio and TV?”

During the two days when they’d been readying the shelter, Ray had taken his portable SAME radio off when it kept getting hung up. He’d only remembered to turn it on when he’d taken it to the shelter. Of course, in the shelter, the radio was useless unless connected to an outside antenna. He remedied all the lapses and turned on the international scanner. This particular unit covered every frequency from AM radio bands to 1.3GHz satellite radio. The scanner was working despite there being almost no activity. Finally the NWS issued another report.

Repeating our earlier broadcast, the country has experienced an unprecedented series of natural disasters. The Cascadia slippage caused a series of earthquakes from Vancouver, British Columbia south to northern California. The volcanoes of the Cascade Range, excluding Mt. St. Helens, all erupted.

This led to unrest at Mammoth Mountain in Long Valley and increased seismic activity at Yellowstone. After Long Valley unexpectedly explosively erupted, Seismologists at Yellowstone raised the alert level to Orange, having commenced evacuations when the level was raised to Yellow. Yellowstone erupted several hours later.

Ash has reached from the west coast to the Atlantic Ocean. It is unknown, at this time, how long the ash will remain in the air. Speculation runs from several months to several years. This announcement will be updated or rebroadcast on the hour.

“Katy, bar the door!”

“No shit.”

“The greenhouse!”

“It’s triple glazed polycarbonate, it may hold up; unless, we get rain. I guess I should have taken Jerry’s advice and installed water systems at the peaks of the roofs and under the eaves. I wonder how those fiction authors are doing.”

“What do you mean?”

“Jerry D Young lives in Reno, Fleataxi near Elko, Nevada and TOM lives in Palmdale about 3 miles from the San Andreas Fault.”

“So what?”

“Much of what you see before you resulted from things I read in their stories. However, I don’t recall any of them predicting times like these.”

“Probably because it would be unbelievable. Any one of those geological events would have been a total disaster unto itself. You add them up and they could very well constitute an ELE.”

“ELE?”

“Extinction Level Event.”

“Oh, right, Deep Impact. That would be all that we would need.”

“I don’t know what would have been worse, the present situation or WW III.”

“Bite your tongue. A series of events on this scale will affect the entire world. Remember Tambora? Remember Toba?”

“The year without summer?”

“Yeah, 1816. Multiply that by 10 or even 100 times more. For all we know, there could be 5,000mi³ of ash in the air.”

“So, that means...”

“No crops for who knows how long. All those people starving and we all know what that means.”

“Yeah, war.”

“We’re going to be here for a very long time. Any ideas about how we entertain ourselves?”

“You have the reloading equipment and components, right? How about we reload all of that brass? It’s not like we lack the time to figure it out and you have all of those reloading books.”

After fits and starts, they figured out the reloading process and reloaded the brass.

Indeed they had time on their hands. When the camera began showing traces of light they suited up and began the task of removing the ash. Fortunately, it hadn’t rained. There was between 2 and 3 feet of ash on the ground. The greenhouse came first, followed by the homes. Next, they removed the dead plants from the greenhouse and added them to the compost bin.

Ray – Chapter 12

“It’s a shame you didn’t have reloads for the Mk 211.”

“I couldn’t get everything. At least I had match ball bullets and we loaded them to M1022 specs.”

“How did you know the specs?”

“I disassembled a round and weighed the bullet and the powder. I had a lab analyze the powder and bought a dozen 8-pound cans. The bullets are the same weight and match grade.”

“No reloads for the 25mm?”

“Sorry. Sandy, could you ladies see what you can do about starting new plants in the greenhouse?”

“Do we need to suit up?”

“I believe that you can get by with the N-100 masks and a head covering. Visibility is about ½ mile and it started to snow as we were finishing up so dress warmly.”

“We’re going to end up with 30” of concrete.”

“No we won’t; we’re just taking a breather and will be out with the Bobcat moving ash after we eat.”

The state horse of Vermont is the Morgan. Ray had thought about getting a herd, but didn’t. Good horses were expensive and needed shelter and feed. The acreage wasn’t that far from a Morgan breeder; but, with 30” of ash on the ground topped with snow, it was doubtful they could get to the breeder. Over the next several days, they did succeed in removing the ash and snow from the four one acre lots. What they couldn’t move from the garden areas was tilled into the soil.

You may recall Ray tilling between the garden rows. He’d purchased a Troy-bilt Big Red Horse tiller. He chose that model principally because it was the most expensive and had a 20” width. It was the perfect width for the gardens with their 30” row spacing. They took turns with the tiller and before they finished, the snow halted their activity. They only had one of the four ½ acre gardens tilled. Each garden took about 62-64 passes with a nominal overlap.

For weeks they continued to sleep in the shelter and go topside to work. Ray periodically stuck his diesel tank and became concerned at the falling level. As time permitted, they began clearing one lane in the road in the direction of the nearest fuel depot in Burlington. They scooped and dumped the ash, fearful that plowing it would abrade the

bucket to the point where it was unusable. Ray hadn't purchased either the tiller or backhoe at the time for the Toolcat 5600T due to financial limits. If he coulda, he shoulda; and now he wished he woulda.

It wasn't the end of the world in that regard, the dealer in Burlington had them in stock and he could pay in gold, just as he could for the diesel and propane. Burlington was a ghost town, literally. He assumed that perhaps the residents had moved south, Vermonters are a hardy bunch. Fortunately, on Church Street is the Burlington Town Center mall with over 75 specialty shops and 15 national retailers such as Macy's, Hollister Co., Abercrombie & Fitch, American Eagle Outfitters, and Old Navy.

The first order of business was diesel fuel and more generators. Next, they acquired accessories for the Toolcat including a tiller. That was another tip from the fiction, this time from Jerry. However, he couldn't find a Unimog or a Rokon bike. When they finished stripping the ghost town of anything that would insure their long term survival they wanted for little; except, perhaps, storage space. "Maybe," he thought, "I should write a book, Frankenstein II."

This talented group of Marines had a shortcoming, limited skill sets. Steve and Ray were great when it came to shooting and Andy was very effect at their logistics. The Colonel was a lawyer and who needs a lawyer when the world ends? What they did need was a mechanic, an electrician, a plumber and a farmer. They needed to clear the road to the horse breeder and see if he or any of his horses survived. They had tack they'd picked up in Burlington. They had western guns from a gun dealer in the Burlington area. What good is a gun belt, scabbard, six-shooter and a .45-70 rifle without a horse to ride?

Like Master Po always said, 'Patience, grasshopper.'

They cleared the road to the breeder's and found that, with his limited resources, he'd only been able to take his best breeders. A large number of Morgan's had been left behind in a barn. Many were dead, but not all. Ten fillies and two colts survived. There was enough hay and grain for a herd of 60 or more for a full year. They began the arduous task of keeping the animals fed and watered while they erected a building to house them. The building needed a hay loft and storage for the grain in addition to stalls for the horses. It was a massive undertaking because they didn't have a carpenter either.

There was all the lumber they needed in Burlington and they limited the concrete work to footings. Slowly, over additional weeks, the barn was erected, literally one piece at a time. About all one could say about the finished barn that it was squared up on all axes and solidly built. It had a dirt floor and external wood heater, should it be required. There was also room for cattle, hogs and chickens, if they ever found some. There probably wasn't a single stick of firewood or chunk of coal in the greater Burlington area. Each home now had its own diesel generator fueled directly from a diesel tanker. The fuel distributor had both PRI-G and PRI-D in stock as well as barrels of anti-gelling fluid.

“I can only see one major problem Ray.”

“What problem Sandy?”

“Well...the implant is only good for 3 years.”

“How’s that a problem, you drop good pups.”

“You’re awful.”

“I am that.”

The greenhouse is doing better than I expected. I planted some of those beans we had in stock and they appear to be breeding true. We don’t have any rice seed, so it’s going to be beans and bread.”

“You gals bake darn good bread. I hear that if you eat enough beans, you stop generating methane.”

“Could be, but it will be a killer getting there. Have you picked up much on the radios?”

“Just isolated conversations from the Gulf Coast. I haven’t tried to make contact with anyone yet. Tomorrow will be a year to the day that Cascadia slipped.”

“Only a year? It seems like forever.”

◦

After the events around the world became apparent, the Chinese changed their plans. It was extremely unlikely that anyone could come to the aid of Australia. Taiwan would be there when they got around to it. Australia had a much more precious commodity, food. That thorn in their side, Kim Jong-un, was but a distant memory. The Japanese wouldn’t attack anyone ever again. Europe was much like China, buried in snow and ash. The disaster in the US had been catastrophic and had affected most of the world to one extent or another. The loss of life was estimated to be nearly six billion. It was doubtful that many, if any, Americans had survived; many, because they had picked up a few radio transmissions from the area known as the Gulf Coast.

Only now, a year after the events, were they able to see through the ash and begin to survey the globe. The infrared picked a bit of heat along the Gulf Coast, a bit in southern California and one tiny spot in Vermont. That shouldn’t be a problem; those people had to be beneath 20’ of snow. The resolution wasn’t good enough to tell more than that. The coordinates indicated somewhere in the vicinity of or in Burlington, Vermont. That single hit was dismissed along with the hit around San Diego.

◦

“We’re pregnant.”

“Speak for yourself; I’m not a medical miracle.”

“I love you, you know.”

“Gee, I hope so seeing how I bought you all of those guns.”

“I’ll say one thing; you have a one track mind.”

“Two; you and my guns. Oops, make that four, I forgot the kids. I don’t know how I could have done that, not with the dirty diapers I’ve changed.”

“Have you checked the greenhouse?”

“Is there something wrong?”

“No, it’s doing fabulous. I think we may have a bumper crop and actually add to our stores. It’s good; we have a lot of empty pints and quarts.”

“How are we doing on lids?”

“I’d like to have more, but we’re ok for the moment.”

“I meant to tell you; Steve and Andy found some chickens. We can get fish from Lake Champlain so that puts us closer to having a balanced diet.”

“Has anyone figured out how old those horses are?”

“We checked his records and as near as we could tell, they were three years old when we found them. I think they start calling them mares and stallions at age four.”

“Any idea about their blood lines?”

“Well, if we’ve correctly identified the horses, they’re out of different sires and dams. Andy said that we should wait to breed them until they reach age five. Steve and Andy are already training them to harness and saddle.”

“Will we have enough feed?”

“It looks like it; some of the sheltered fields are producing hay. We should be able to salvage grain. Have you ever ridden?”

“No, never; have you?”

“I guess that we’ll learn together. We have a lot of tack and there was more at the breeders.”

“Was the breeder part of the University or separate?”

“Apparently he was separate. We’ve looked and haven’t found another herd. The Morgan horse is also the state horse of Massachusetts, did you know that?”

“I saw something by Disney once. No, come to think of it, I didn’t know that.”

“Once we start breeding, we should end up with some geldings. I hear that mares and geldings are a bit easier to ride. Andy says that’s hogwash, it’s all in the training. I don’t really know much about horses and I believe I’ve told you everything I know on the subject.”

“About the only thing I know is that you shouldn’t shoot a gun from the back of a horse.”

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Ray had a lot on his mind. He didn’t know how bad the world situation was, but he could imagine. The events that started with the Cascadia slip had turned out to be a one in a trillion example of nature at its very worst. Had Long Valley and Yellowstone not erupted, most of the country would have done fine. Back in 1980 when Mt. St. Helens erupted, the ash only carried across Washington. None of the previous Supervolcano eruptions had dumped ash much past mid-America.

It had added up this time and ash fell in the Atlantic. They had been very lucky in a way, at least they’d found small amounts of farmland here and there which were nearly devoid of ash. The previous eruption of Yellowstone had been the Lava Creek eruption and it was the second largest and traveled to Louisiana. They might never know because that broadcast they’d picked up on the NWS radio had been the final broadcast. This had been far worse than the special that aired titled ‘Supervolcano.’

“Are you ready to learn how to ride?”

Ray – Chapter 13

“Aren’t they a little young?”

“No, they’re 4 years old; four calendar years. I have one of the stallions ready to go.”

“Shouldn’t I start on a mare?”

“You’ll love this stallion. Just let him know you’re the boss and you’ll be ok. The main thing with a horse is to not show fear. Do your Gunny Highway thing.”

Steve had trained both stallions and 5 mares. For no particular reason, the stallions had done better with the training than the mares. They didn’t take to harness as well as the mares and he decided they would be riding horses. He talked to Sandy about riding, but she begged off on account of her ‘delicate condition’. It wasn’t long after that Jan informed him that she too was expecting. The Colonel and Andy didn’t seem to have that problem.

When they were preparing for the end of the world, they had all assumed it meant WW III. It had been part of their extensive preparations in so far as firearms and ordnance went. Fortunately the M1A rifles could be used to hunt with the soft point ammo. They hadn’t seen any wild game although there should have been a few head left. Andy insisted he’d seen a Moose but only had his pistol.

One of their principal concerns had been the inability to local dairy cattle. Vermont was famous for the amount of milk it produced and shipped. There had to be some cattle out there, somewhere. They hadn’t been able to travel far from their location, perhaps this accounted for their failure to locate cattle. Hogs, on the other hand, would be a rare find in Vermont. One estimate cited a statistic: there were only 600 sows in Vermont and they represented only 2% of the pork consumed in the state.

Perhaps, when they could travel further afield, they could locate hogs. They might have to try New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts or Connecticut. For that matter, they might be able to slip across the border into Canada. However, Massachusetts and New Hampshire came to mind for some reason. Then, Ray remembered, Agar Foods, a restaurant and grocery supplier from Massachusetts.

Agar had a full line including beef, pork, poultry, lamb and seafood. They also sold dry goods including rice and flour. The problem became finding out where they were located and if they could, whether or not Agar had any edible food. Most food wasn’t a problem except when it came to certain things. Their coffee supply was running low and potatoes were now being substituted for rice. Other things, like toilet paper and feminine hygiene supplies were running low despite cleaning out Burlington. Perhaps they’d missed something; they’d have to look again.

One thing they weren't short of was clothing. They'd made out like bandits at the Mall and had a bit of everything and a lot of some things. They'd paid the full asking price for everything they gathered. The thing was, there was no one to ask to be paid. As weather and road conditions permitted, they headed to New Hampshire, where they found a bunch of hogs. On the voyage home, they spotted cattle, eight dairy cows and one bull. Things were looking better. In time, they'd have pork chops, ham, bacon and a good steak.

They eventually tracked down Agar's warehouse and brought back loads of dry goods. Every hole in their food supplies was refilled, and then some. They still couldn't have an outside garden, limiting them to what the greenhouse produced. They returned to America's roots, farming. Using equipment stored in farmers' machine sheds; they harvested grass crops and put it up loose. Grain was salvaged from farms, elevators and anywhere they could find it. With winds slowly clearing the roads or the ash turning into concrete, travel became easier.

Ashley was born in due course without complications and soon after Steve and Jan welcomed Susan. However, unless they discovered more survivors, this group of children could be the last children born on the small acreage.

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"You know Sandy, salvaging these things under the present circumstances is totally legitimate. Why is it then that I feel like a thief?"

"You've got me, don't most preppers prepare for the worse, hope for the best and salvage after the fact, if necessary?"

"They did in the fiction. Some authors promoted it more than others."

"You could discuss it with the Colonel, he was a judge. Regardless, I don't see that we have much choice. We can't manufacture some of the things we need. Somewhere, probably in a warehouse, is several days' worth of output from a plant that makes toilet paper and feminine hygiene supplies. They're inexpensive products that are worth their weight in gold because we can't make them ourselves."

"I guess so. In the long run, we may end up traveling to far places to pick up a truckload of those things we can't produce. That begs the question, it still bothers me."

"Do you know where you might have to go?"

"I made a list of places based on some of the information in the stories. We could get coffee in New Orleans, those paper products in Wisconsin and Arkansas. Much of what we'd need could be found in Sam's Clubs, Super Wal-Marts or Costco stores. We'd probably have to set up the Hummer with an M109 on long trips. Some survivors might not be friendly."

“Do you believe they are other survivors?”

“There have to be. Assuming a die off rate of 90%, there’d have to be 650 million people alive somewhere. Since the problems originated in this country, it might be as low as 1% surviving here. That’s still 3 million plus. One story I read suggested an illness killed off 99.9%, leaving 300 thousand. That’s still a lot of people and would fill several sports stadiums. Most of those people will be armed to the teeth and there will no doubt be bad along with the good.”

“So, you’ll just be fighting a different war?”

“It’s possible.”

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The following year, using semi-tractor trailer rigs, they set out looking for those things Ray and Sandy discussed. They found salt in western New York and northwest Pennsylvania, paper products in Arkansas, sugar in Michigan and coffee in New Orleans. A trip later the same year to Houston provided a lifetime supply of PRI products and unlimited diesel they could haul. Connecticut was a source of reloading supplies and ammunition. As time permitted, they still got in range time, just in case and just because.

Ray and Sandy’s children need firearms and they started off with Ruger Bearcats and the model 62 reproductions. They started with CB caps and worked their way up through the short and long to the long rifle. Ray skipped several calibers and moved them to 9mm pistols and revolvers. Their rifles were that classic .30-30s. Ray was adamant concerning the use of .223 caliber rifles, but was finally forced to relent when it came to his daughters. In time, they got the Hi-Powers and the HK416s. The western arms were Vaqueros, Colts and Marlin rifles. Shotguns were the venerable Mossberg 590A1s and long barreled Remington 870s.

Ray and Sandy ended up with 1 son and 3 daughters, forcing a trip to Virginia to visit H&K USA. That trip turned out to be the thing that dreams are made of. The factory didn’t make all of the arms they had in inventory, some had come from Germany. There were several examples of the entire H&K product line. Use of the M109 on the Hummer became optional. What they really needed was more M1114s.

They ran into their first group of military survivors in the Norfolk area, a company of Marines. It seems they were all single men with no place to go and there were ample supplies in Norfolk. It started as a confrontation until the four men produced their military IDs. Then the once a Marine, always a Marine kicked in and the Colonel ended up in charge, sort of.

The survivors were divided as to whether or not they wanted to accompany the four back to Burlington. They were only promised hard work, 10’ of snow and instruction in

the finer use of firearms by two retired scout snipers. Those that agreed borrowed some M1114s and went with them back to the H&K USA plant. They had a field day selecting some of the best firearms produced in the world. They selected HK416, HK417 and MSG90A1 rifles. Most opted for the USP Tactical pistol. Suppressors were available for all weapons, as were magazines. A different location, a police department, supplied riot guns and various low recoil rounds. A stop at another military post produced all of the ammo they could haul.

There were, indeed, other survivors and not all of them were friendly. The first such encounter happened at the best time it could have. They were north bound on an interstate with the Marines at point with an H&K GMG and tail end Charlie with the venerable Ma Deuce. The M1114 in the middle of the convoy was also sporting the Ma Deuce and pulling a trailer loaded with extra boxes of belted .50BMG in the standard 4:1 combat mix, ergo, AP and APIT.

As they moved along on the interstate moving about 50mph, they came to a blocked underpass and it was instantly obvious that it was roadblock. Unable to turn around, they stopped well back and huddled. The decision was to attack the roadblock with one Ma Deuce and the GMG (grenade machine gun). The officer in charge of the Marines who elected to go to Vermont, was in charge of the operation. They began laying down fire and soon the vehicles were burning and several people running away. When they moved closer, an AT-4 reached out to them but missed. Andy grabbed a pair of LAWs and ran forward. When he was about 150 meters out, he stopped and aimed the first rocket.

The rocket was a dead on hit and cleared about half of the roadblock. The second finished the job, but when Andy turned to return to his tractor, a single shot rang out and he collapsed in a heap. Ray and Steve rushed to check him out and found a hole in his lower left lung, a sucking chest wound (pneumothorax). They applied an ACS to the exit wound and a plastic flap with one corner loose to the entry point. A Marine took over driving Andy's truck and when they moved on, they built their speed to the limit.

Andy's lung slowly began inflate and by the time they were at the acreage, that situation resolved itself. It became Cindy's turn to do what she could. While her RN license was expired, she had the most medical knowledge in the group and debrided both wounds and sutured the back wound closed. She applied an Asherman Chest Seal to the chest wound as a precaution, started an IV of 500ml of D5W to bulk his blood, gave him morphine and began a regimen of antibiotics.

"At least we didn't have to try and find a vet. How long will he be laid up?"

"10-12 days before the stitches come out and then we'll see."

"That, Cindy, was an admiral job."

"How did he get shot so many times?"

“Probably saw combat before he got into logistics.”

“Either of the other of you two have similar scars?”

“Nope; scout snipers are sneaky bastards.”

“That’s the first time I’ve heard you cuss.”

“Sorry, I’m just po’d. It’s always been a case of when, not if, since the slip and subsequent events. Now, our next order of business is locating housing for the troops.”

“Why not take over that motel just this side of Burlington?”

“That might work if we can get power and heat. For now, we can use portable generators and propane heaters. Have to find a bigger generator and see about heat. They probably used gas heat and gas water heaters. If we can get a large enough unit and a large empty propane tank, we’ll be set. We should be able to find jets at a plumbing business or plumbing supplier.”

“Check first on whether they used natural gas or propane.”

The motel used propane and got it from AmeriGas in Williston, reasonably close to their location. That was to be the last trip of the year. Ray and Steve started checking out the Marines on the weapons. Each man tried all of their H&K acquisitions and most elected to carry the HK417 rifle. One younger Lance Corporal was a natural shooter and went with the MSG90A1 sniper rifle. He was introduced to Melanie during a practice session and was immediately smitten, as was she.

He asked Steve if he could see his daughter. The old fashioned approach coupled with the fact that the Lance Corporal had exceptional shooting abilities led Steve and Jan to agree. Steve began training Lance Corporal Jason Bennett in the fine art of being a scout sniper. The Marines missed the companionship of women and proposed a return to Norfolk where they would try and persuade a few of the women survivors to return with them to Vermont.

The Gunny’s Club, which included the Colonel as an honorary member, concluded that they couldn’t stop the men, had they wanted to. Plus, they were divided on the issue. The Colonel was tasked with laying out the group’s position to the Marines. Only Jason was staying in Burlington. Jason found a good used diesel pickup on a dealer’s lot and after replacing the fuel and battery, got it to run. He continued to practice, despite the cold. And, he continued to see Melanie, usually at Steve and Jan’s. Jason was a man of character, reminding Steve and Jan of Ray.

Ray – Chapter 14

When the Marines returned, those that did, each had a companion on his arm. Additional supplies were moved to the motel and the women took over cooking in the motel's kitchen. Jason finally asked Steve for his permission to marry Melanie.

"I didn't know men still followed the old tradition of asking the girl's father."

"You forget; I've seen you shoot."

"Ok then, where are you going to live?"

"I've been checking the area and found a new singlewide mobile home. It's setup for propane. I found a 20kw diesel generator too. We could select furnishings from the furniture store. I intend to ask Ray about getting a plot like the rest of you have."

When Jason asked Ray about a lot and explained why, Ray told him that he'd think about it and let him know. Ray and Sandy decided to make the one acre plot a wedding gift. Absent a minister, the Colonel was elected to perform the marriage ceremony, whether he agreed or not. The only stipulation placed on the couple was that the marriage had to wait until the home was in place.

An area was cleared and the mobile home set in place. Except for propane and electricity, the utilities would have to wait until spring. Jason was a 'hillbilly' from Tennessee and could butcher anything, with minimal equipment. He wasn't a half bad backyard mechanic, either. When he found his generator, Jason found several rebuild kits, oil and filters for not just his generators, but for the others. Jason was proving to be an important asset for the acreage. Plus, he could shoot with the best of them.

"I think that Jason is going to solve several problems we've had."

"He had a very good upbringing Ray."

"It shows, doesn't it?"

"Yes it does. The boy's a Southern Baptist but nobody's perfect. We're Methodist and more middle of the road. At least he doesn't preach. I hope that doesn't present a problem for the two of them."

"Love can overcome most obstacles Steve."

"You know that rifle he has is a purpose built sniper's rifle. Man can he make it sing. It has that Schmidt and Bender 3-12x50 PM II telescopic sight and it's a good one. And, the boy's a natural born scout sniper. I asked about why he hadn't put in FORECON and he said he hadn't intended to make the Corps a career. His opinion of the M4 is the same as yours."

“What’s he using for a backup rifle?”

“Both the 416 and 417, depending upon the circumstances. He good with both of them and you should see him shoot the .45.”

“Does he have hunting guns?”

“He went scouting around and found a used 870 and used 9422. He doesn’t have any western style arms, yet. He’s resourceful and that’s probably a temporary problem. He’s a lot like you.”

“Have you ever given any thought to why we have those old fashioned firearms when we have some of the latest and greatest?”

“Not really. Because we wanted to be cowboys when we grew up? Actually something about the .45 Colt has the advantage of being capable of using black powder and cast lead bullets. And, you’ll have to admit, those Marlin rifles fit a scabbard better than an M14.”

“Diesel hasn’t been a problem.”

“True, but everything wears out. What have you been hearing on the radios? You’re still maintaining a radio watch, aren’t you?”

“As much as we can, yes. I’ve heard some oriental gibberish, Chinese, I think. I also heard some English that sounded like an Australian accent. Tried to reach them but didn’t have any luck.”

“So there are survivors in other countries too. That’s good. Of course they’ll no doubt blame their problems on the US, like they always do.”

“Nobody controls Nature, except maybe God.”

“What about around the US?”

“I still hear an occasional transmission from the area of the Gulf Coast. Thought I heard someone say something about San Diego. Got a clear transmission from Houston, but the guy was signing off. By the time I rotate the beam, it’s usually too late.”

“Houston? We were there and New Orleans is most certainly on the Gulf Coast. Maybe we should go back this coming summer and see if we can find the people.”

“We could just as easily find trouble.”

“We could handle it if some of the fellas we brought up from Norfolk came along.”

“When is the wedding?”

“As soon as we get in septic and water.”

“So, June then?”

“If the ground is thawed enough, yes.”

“Even if it’s just close, I think we can dig through a foot or so of frost. Does he have the tank and pipes?”

“He has everything they need. And, get this; although the trailer is heated and has lights, she never goes there except to tidy up. Anytime they see each other, it’s in our home.”

“Not your average Marine.”

“The kid is pure gold. He’s only 6 years older than she is, if that makes a difference.”

“It shouldn’t; I’m 14 years older than Sandy.”

“So, want to go to Houston in July?”

“If I’m still hearing radio traffic, I suppose we should.”

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The Chinese had attempted to invade Australia. They sent every available naval vessel, all available troops and all of the supplies they could round up. An Australian Orion patrol aircraft spotted the invasion fleet near the end of its patrol range. Eight RAAF F/A-18 fighters equipped with B-61-10 bombs, acquired through NATO, attacked the Chinese fleet and left it sunk, sinking or on fire. Follow on flights with Orion’s disclosed no signs of the Chinese Fleet, which was limping home beyond the range of the Orion’s radar. Had the Orion’s extended their range another 100 NM. They would have seen 9 vessels, making way at about 5 knots, headed back home. The debris field at the site of the attack was enormous.

These had been the only shots fired in WW III.

While no one would know for centuries, the Slip which led to the various eruptions had put approximately ~2,900mi³ of ash in the air. After the last NWS broadcast, Mt. St. Hel- en’s also erupted, as a Supervolcano adding an additional ~400mi³ of ash. Those events had possibly produced the perhaps the largest amount of volcanic ash in the his- tory of the planet. While other eruptions had produced more gases and lava, ergo, the Siberian Traps, this had produced the most ash. Individually, the eruptions ranged from

paroxysmal in the case of the Cascadian volcanoes to mega-colossal for Long Valley, Yellowstone and later Mt. St. Helens. The three big eruptions all had a VEI of 8 or higher.

By way of comparison, the Huckleberry Ridge eruption put out ~585mi³ of ash.

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With the last shovel load of dirt back in place, the mobile home was ready for full occupancy. Two days later, Jason and Melanie were married and took up residence. While they enjoyed a brief honeymoon, plans were underway for a trip to Texas and the Gulf Coast. They now had four M1114s and Ray's Hummer and planned to take 4 reefers to use as reefers or box trailers plus two tankers for kerosene. Some of the heaters required kerosene and it made a good anti-gelling fluid. The tankers were set up as road trains, with three trailers each and the trailers were set up with a pair each of 53' trailers.

The morning they left, there were long goodbyes and more than a few tears. Ray promised to call home each night when they stopped via radio. Several of the Marines would be marrying their companions when they returned from the trip. Those that stayed behind were a combination guard force and salvagers. They wanted to get more of those logs homes. Given the terrain of the acreage, it was barely suitable for garden spots and a small pasture.

Jason rode with Ray on the first leg.

"How's married life treating you so far Jason?"

"Man, I really lucked out. Married the girl of my dreams and she's a shooter, not some limp wrist liberal."

"Steve said you weren't going to make a career out of the Corps."

"I hadn't planned on it and we haven't been paid since I don't know when, but I guess I'm finally out. Planned to go back home and go to college. I had a lot saved up for that."

"Still have it?"

"Yeah, but it's not worth much. Got lucky, I guess, Grandpa gave me 4 rolls each of 1964 dimes, quarters and halves. When it looked like we might have problems on the west coast, I got to a coin dealer and bought all the one-tenth ounce gold coins I could get. It's not many, only 17, but they should be worth something one of these days."

"You didn't go back and break into his safe?"

"Uh, I tried to, but someone beat me to it. What are you smiling about?"

“Not that, I was a million miles away. I have a set of DVDs I bought from the Military Channel that I watch sometimes. There was this two part program about WW II. The narrator was English and the writer must have been too. The way he told it, the US was lucky that England allowed the US to help them in the war. Their commanders were brilliant and ours were screw ups.”

“Interesting. Do you actually think we can hook up with survivors in Houston or east along the Gulf Coast?”

“All we can do is try, Jason. We’ve been this way before and the drive down should be much quicker. I have the scanner and if we pick up any amateurs, I’ll get on the Icom and try to talk to them.”

“Your set up is way cool.”

“What part?”

“Everything; nice log homes, fancy bomb shelter, an armory that’s beyond belief. Man, you have stuff that no civilian could get in a million years. How did you manage to do that?”

“I bought some of it; some was a gift and let’s just say I had low friends in high places.”

“Those M72s are Marine Corps only.”

“I didn’t say where my friends worked.”

“Some corrupt supply Sergeant, huh?”

“No to the former; yes to the latter.”

“How did you afford it all?”

“How were you planning on paying for college? I did the same for 20 years and had a lot more than you might imagine. That extra pay you get for being in combat helped, too.”

“You were a scout sniper?”

“For most of my career, yes.”

“I don’t suppose you kept count, did you?”

Ray – Chapter 15

“It’s not something you’d put on your resume. I suppose my actual count was about $\frac{1}{3}$ of Carlos Hathcock’s official count. However, his actual count was probably three times his official count. Officially, mine was 34.”

“What about Steve?”

“Probably in the same ballpark. We don’t talk about it much.”

“Why Vermont? Man, it’s cold there in normal times. With this volcanic winter, well...you know.”

“I was established and owned land there. My parents left California and bought a piece of land. When they were killed, I sold off all but 15 acres and had a log home erected over the old basement. You might as well hear the rest of it. I worked as an armed guard for a bank for a time and then went to work for FedEx Courier Services in a special division.”

“That’s how I met Sandy, but, that’s another story. We ended up married and I continued working for FedEx until couriers started to be killed off. We were ok financially and I quit.”

“Wow. Can you believe the limited notice we had about Nature turning on us?”

“All things considered, I thought they did pretty good. No one can predict the types of things that happened until they become obvious. We had warning on both Long Valley and Yellowstone because of the observatories. The eruptions in the Cascade Range were predictable because of the slip, but not really until the plates slipped. It was rather bizarre.”

Some of his many questions answered, Jason fell silent. Ray was relieved because that was one of the longest conversations he’d had in a while and he was still basically a loner. They continued on, stopping at dusk and putting up in abandoned motels. It only took a few days to get within range of Houston. He didn’t actually pick up any amateurs until they were southeast of Lake Livingston. They were faint calls on the 2 meter band instead of the previous calls on the 20 meter band. As they neared Houston, the radio traffic became clearer and he made a call.

“Breaker, this is Ray Johnson on 2 meters, calling for whoever was just transmitting.”

He was met with stony silence.

“I say again, this is GySgt Ray Johnson calling for whoever was just transmitting.”

“Do you have relief supplies Sergeant?”

“Negative. We brought trailers and tankers down from Vermont looking to do some trading or salvaging.”

“We?”

“It’s a convoy of 6 tankers and 4 trailers protected by former members of Uncle Sam’s Misguided Children. We made one trip before to Products Research, Inc.”

“Hauled all of those PRI products, did ya?”

“Affirmative.”

“Whatcha lookin’ for?”

“Kerosene for one thing. Long Term Storage supplies for another.”

“Know where the Astrodome is?”

“Is it still standing?”

“Some of it. Meet us in the parking lot. We’ll be driving three red Dodge Ramchargers.”

“Acknowledged. It will take us three hours.”

“Roger, out.”

Ray called the convoy to a halt using the FRS radios. They were actually about 1½ hours from the Dome which was on the 610 freeway. They discussed the pros and cons of meeting the guy. The purpose of the trip was to meet other survivors, so they decided to chance it. The people wouldn’t get much; they’d drained the last of their diesel fuel into the vehicles at their last pit stop.

They got within ½ mile of the Reliant Stadium aka Astrodome and Ray and Steve did a bit of reconnaissance. They were three red pickups parked in the lot and no other vehicles in sight. They counted 12 men at the pickups. A decision was reached that two of the M1114s would cover their front with one on each side and tail end Charlie covering their rear. At the entrance to the parking lot, Ray radioed that they were coming in.

They were greeted by twelve well-armed men who slung their rifles when the armed Hummers came into view. Ray’s HK417 had the ACOG installed along with the suppressor. Steve, who was similarly armed, dismounted and moved towards the men.

“Johnson?” one said eyeing both men.

“That’s me.”

“How big are those tankers?”

“Eight thousand gallons per.”

“We can show you where to get it. What do you want to fill the cargo trailers with?”

“Manufactured goods. Paper products, food, at bit of everything a person could use in times like these.”

“Can’t guarantee the kerosene is still good. Other stuff...you’re on your own. What say to 2 ounces of gold for us leading you to the kerosene?”

“I’ll pay it.” (It worked out to about 25¢ per gallon.) “Need some diesel to fill the tankers the Hummers are pulling.”

“Same place, but it’s no good.”

“Not a problem.”

The kerosene was reasonably stable and would burn without any problem and would thin out the diesel. The diesel could be treated with PRI-D. They’d salvage what they could of the other things, probably from warehouses, and head back to Folgers in New Orleans. The Marines had been going through the cigarettes and he’d look for more of those, too. Life’s little luxuries were important, if you could find them.

Most of the original inhabitants didn’t smoke and those that did, smoked cigars. And Andy had a very large supply of those stinking Marsh Wheeling stoogies. Ray figured he must have been a Maverick fan. He had them by the case; probably a lifetime supply. Did he get them from Wheeling, WV or Frankfort, IN? It was probably a good thing he loaded up; the excise tax put National Cigar out of business.

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They returned home fully loaded and without incident. A frequency and times had been established with the people in Houston to keep in touch. Slowly the little community grew and several generations later the heirs were still using the firearms assembled before and in the aftermath. Moose had survived and flourished along with other wild animals. The residents were able to plant outside gardens, after a few generations. More land was taken over to provide for the ever expanding population.

Books claimed that the eruption of Toba some 75,000 years before had reduced the population of the world to perhaps 10,000 breeding pairs.

The "Weak Garden of Eden" model for the origin and dispersal of modern humans posits a spread around 100,000 years ago followed by population bottlenecks. Then,

around 50,000 years ago, a dramatic growth occurred in genetically isolated, small populations. In a 1998 article, Stanley Ambrose proposed an alternative hypothesis – a volcanic winter scenario – to explain recent human differentiation. The bottleneck was caused by a volcanic winter resulting from the super-eruption of Toba in Sumatra. If Ambrose's hypothesis is correct, modern human variations differentiated abruptly through founder effect, genetic drift, and adaptation to local environments after around 70,000 years ago.

Ambrose points out that the Out of Africa dispersal date of around 100,000 years ago fits the generally warm, humid last interglacial period, 130-74,000 years ago. An impressive body of paleontological evidence shows an Afro-Arabian biotic community expanded northward during this period. Several such multi-species dispersals out of Africa have occurred during previous interglacial phases. He considers the variants of the Replacement model to be more accurate and realistic than the Multiregional models.

The number of DNA mutations within a population increases temporally. When a population has passed through a bottleneck, the mutation distribution evidences the bottleneck. DNA studies have identified a significant bottleneck (or bottlenecks) during the last glacial period.

The Multiple Dispersals model proposes a population bottleneck occurred when cold, dry climates isolated populations in Africa. Additional bottlenecks occurred through physical bottlenecks such as the Sinai Peninsula. The first dispersal of anatomically modern humans, to the Levant around 100,000 year ago, is evidenced by early modern human skeletons in the Near East. According to Ambrose, this first dispersal apparently failed to permanently establish modern humans outside of Africa. Genetic evidence shows that non-African populations can be divided into southern Australasian and northern Eurasian populations that divided 50-75,000 years ago.

In contrast, Ambrose's model proposes a scenario of a globally synchronous bottleneck. If bottlenecks were caused by the cold climate, duration was approximately 10,000 years with release 60,000 years ago. If the eruption of Toba alone caused the bottleneck, then release may have followed within a few decades of the volcanic winter 71,000 years ago, or the bottleneck could have lasted 1000 years, during the coldest portion of the Ice Age following the Toba eruption. In the bottleneck scenarios, more individuals survived in the African tropical refugia, resulting in the greatest genetic diversity survival in Africa.

Ambrose concludes that bottlenecks occurred among genetically isolated human populations because of a six-year long volcanic winter and subsequent hyper-cold millennium after the cataclysmic super-eruption of Toba. This volcanic winter played a role in recent human differentiation. The resultant combination of founder effects and genetic drift may account for low human genetic diversity as well as population differences associated with so-called races. The bottleneck hypothesis offers an explanation for why humans exhibit so little genetic variation, yet superficially appear diverse. It also affords an explanation for the apparent recent coalescence of mtDNA and African origins.

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Adapted from 'In the Beginning' by Jason Bennett from his personal conversations with Ray Johnson during the third decade of the 21st century, Old Time standard. Note: the book was inscribed with the following – sine scientia ars nihil est. We think the phrase is Latin and translates to: without knowledge, skill is nothing.

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